The Life of BENITO MUSSOLINI

MARGHERITA G. SARFATTI

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The Life of BENITO MUSSOLINI

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The Life of BENITO MUSSOLINI

From the Italian of
MARGHERITA G. SARFATTI

With a Preface by
BENITO MUSSOLINI

Translated by
FREDERIC WHYTE

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TRANSLATOR'S NOTE.

It has been found necessary to condense somewhat freely Signora Sarfatti's text, partly owing to its great length, partly because many portions of it would be unclear to the English reader unless they were very elaborately annotated.

F. W.

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PREFACE

By BENITO MUSSOLINI

First of all, a confession. I detest those who take me as a subject for their writings and their discourses. No matter whether they speak well or ill of me—I detest them all equally. But the degree of my detestation of them increases when they exhibit me before a vast audience, as is the case here. We have reached the very peak of paradox, therefore, when I am to be found inditing a Preface.

In thus presenting myself I am giving the highest proof of human endurance for the moral edification of my fellow-mortals.

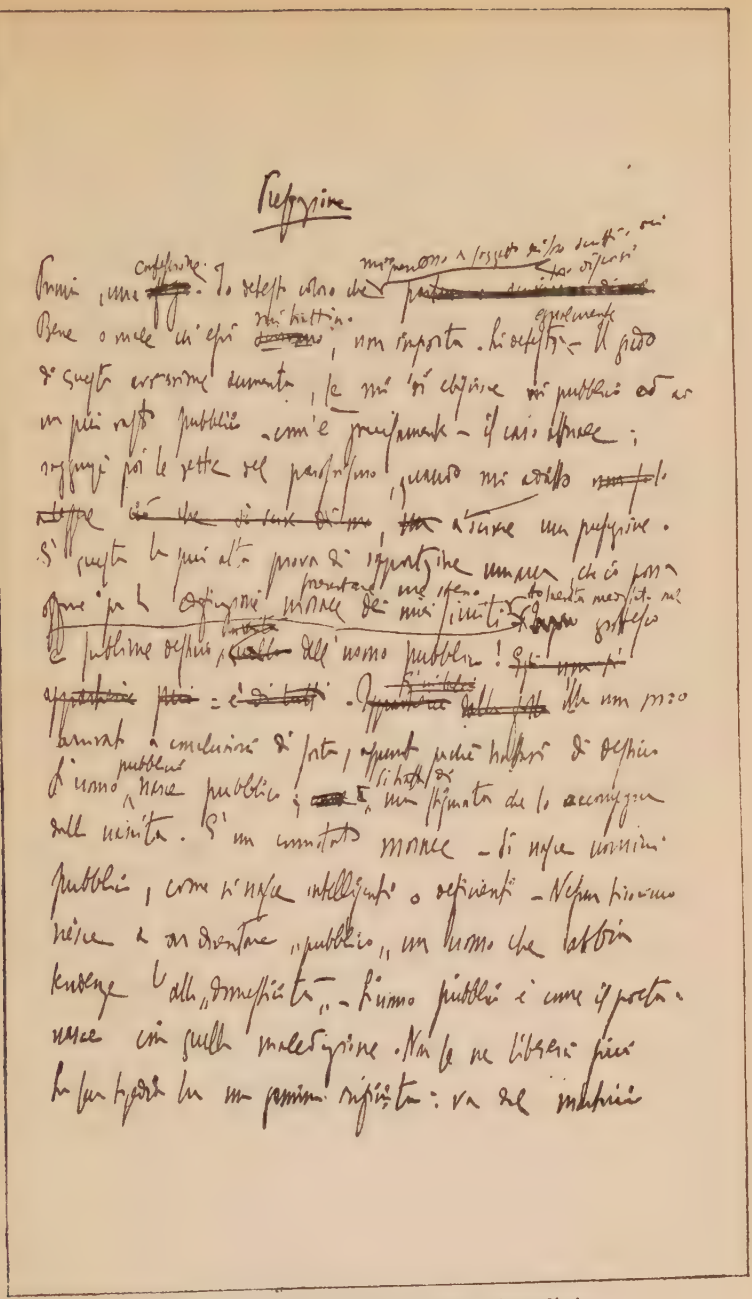
I have sometimes meditated upon the fate, grotesque and sublime, of the public man. But I have not arrived at any conclusions, just because it is Fate we have to deal with. The public man is born "public"—he bears the stigma from his birth. He is a pathological case. You are born a public man as you are born "normal" or "mentally deficient." No kind of apprenticeship will serve to make a "public man" of one whose natural tendency is towards domesticity. The public man, like the poet, is born to his doom. He can never escape it. His tragedy is one of infinite range—it extends from martyrdom to the supplying of autographs.

This confession of mine is a caprice. I am perfectly resigned to my lot as a public man. In fact, I am enthusiastic about it. Not just on account of the publicity which it entails—that phase of vanity lasts only from one's twentieth year to one's twenty-fifth ; not just for the fame and the glory and, perhaps, the bust to which one

may be entitled in the market-place of one's native village. No, it is the thought, the realization, that I no longer belong merely to myself, that I belong to all—loved by all, hated by all—that I am an essential element in the lives of others : this feeling has on me a kind of intoxicating effect. And then, when one belongs to all, one belongs to none. As someone has said already, you may attain the restfulness of solitude in a crowd even better than in a desert.

In this book my life is to be found recorded—at least, such part of it as can be made known, for every man has secrets and shady nooks that are not to be explored. My life is presented in it in the form of a succession of events, in the form of a development of ideas. In essence, it is no great affair—my life. There is nothing extraordinary in it to capture the imagination. No victorious wars, no out-of-the-way adventures. No creations of new systems of thought. It is a life full of movement, certainly, but it is a less interesting life, for instance, than that of the late Mr. Savage Landor, the great traveller. This book pleases me because it presents me with a sense of the proportions as regards time and space and events, and without extravagance—despite friendship and community of work and of ideas. It is possible that the future may modify these proportions—it may reduce or increase them. But with this my biographers of to-morrow will have to do.

MUSSOLINI

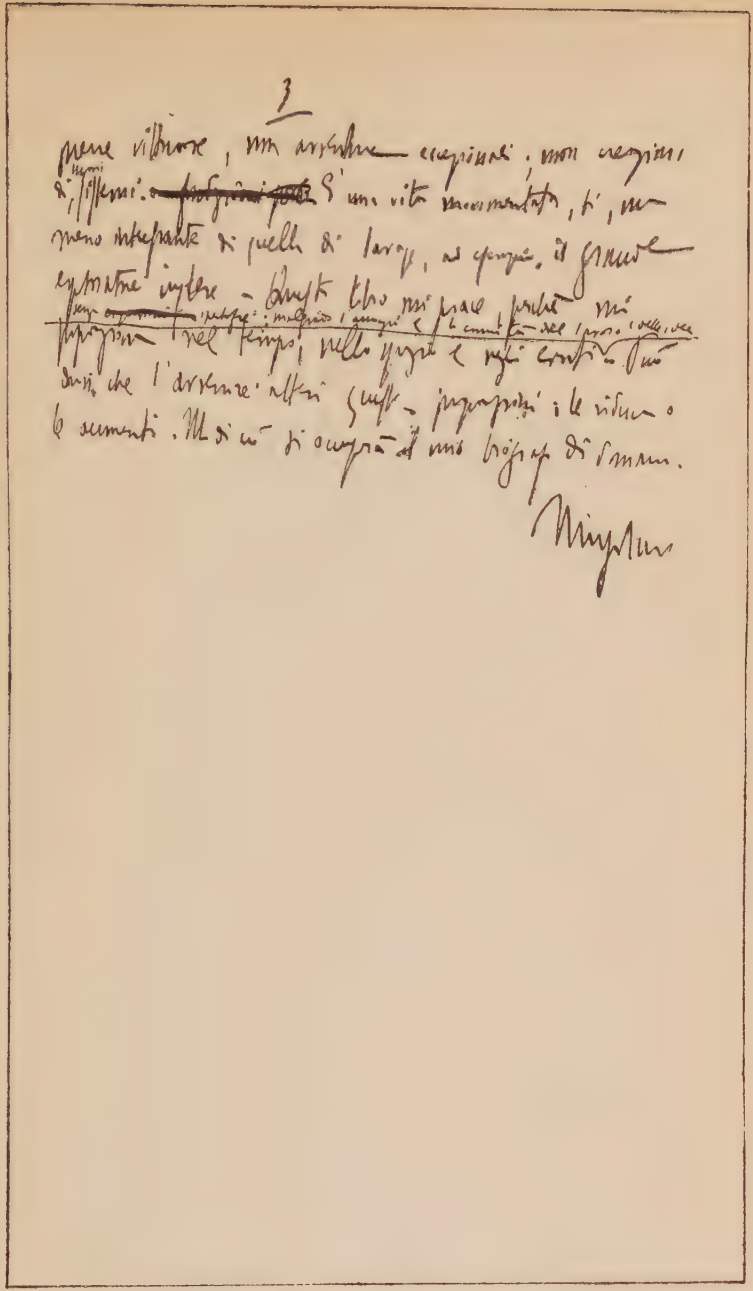


Facsimile of Preface by Benito Mussolini.

all'autore - la mia confessione è un capriccio - il mio
pubblicare rappresenta alla mia fede di nuovo pubblico, davanti
[illegible] che io me ne sia entusiasta - Non già per le soddisfazioni
che la pubblicità reca, ma per [illegible]: [illegible] fare della mia vita
dono ai miei simili, partecipare ad [illegible] - Non già per la fama o
la gloria, anche il basso che l'uomo pubblico gliene può
dare - sulla spiaggia del villaggio natio - no - Il pericolo è la
indifferenza verso di un apparire più, di essere di tutti
- amici di tutti, odiati da tutti - [illegible] necessario alla
vita altrui, ma di una specie di coraggio civile. E poi,
[illegible] c'è di tutto, non è [illegible] nessuno. Già fin dalla [illegible]
una folla [illegible], più che l'ira e [illegible] tuttavia
[illegible] gioia, della [illegible] più che un dogma ...

In questo libro c'è la mia vita. Almeno
quella parte che si può confessare, perchè ogni uomo ha segreti
che [illegible] e angoli d'ombra inesplorabili - C'è la mia vita
come maestro di scuola come politico di idee - In fine,
ma è poca cosa la mia vita - Non c'è niente di
straordinario che possa colpire la fantasia - Non

Facsimile of Preface by Benito Mussolini.



Facsimile of Preface by Benito Mussolini.

CHAPTER I

THE TRAGEDY WITHOUT A HERO

Wars and Hero-Worship—No Great Outstanding Figure in the World War of 1914–18—The Transient Triumph of Materialism—The Return of Idealism with the Commemorations of the Unknown Warrior.

IF we are to believe our best historians and most trustworthy traditions, there never yet was a war until our own time that did not offer at least one compensation for the sorrows and sufferings and disasters brought in its train—the compensation of new heroes to admire and honour. Sometimes, as in the case of Alexander the Great, it was the hero who, by his aims and actions, brought about the war. Sometimes it was the war and its sequels that engendered the new hero and the new phase of hero-worship.

Many illustrations of this truth present themselves. No one, for instance, can think of the tremendous upheaval wrought by the English Revolution of 1642, and of the struggle which ensued, without recalling the austere and dominating personality of Oliver Cromwell —the man who voiced the feelings of his class, the well-to-do burgesses of Great Britain, and who, in the face of a frivolous and spendthrift aristocracy, asserted their claim to play their part in the affairs of the State. The American War of Independence is equally unimaginable without the lofty figure of Washington. And, then, Napoleon ! The whole fabric of the nineteenth century would seem to fall to pieces and crumble into nothingness without the pale face of the Corsican.

The world-war of 1914–18 would seem to be the single exception to the rule. It was with a kind of stupor that we watched the various protagonists of the nations

sink, one after the other, into comparative obscurity. One after another they seemed to drop back into the mass of common people, having proved themselves incapable of bearing the burdens they had shouldered. Greatness is a heavy weight to carry, and when it takes the shape not of a fine uniform merely but of a coat of mail and a helmet whose plume is the target for hard blows—when it is being continually put to the severe tests which should prove it to be *real* greatness and not a mere thing of words—few, indeed, are equal to it.

Thus it was that William II of Germany, from being the great personage of pre-war days, shrank and shrivelled inside his suit of shining armour, dwindling into a mere super upon the stage, the while his war, which was to have been a flamboyant affair of three months or so, dragged on interminably in the drab and dismal and dreadful trenches. And thus General Moltke was to show us that he had inherited nothing but the name of his famous father, while Bethmann-Hollweg as Imperial Chancellor but threw into relief the genius of Bismarck.

It was the same story on the other side. Marshal Joffre, even with the aureole of the Marne illuminating that good, kindly, expansive countenance of his, never seemed a figure in keeping with the magnitude and terror of the events happening round him. *Plutarche a menti!* exclaimed the official historian of the French Headquarters staff, disillusioned by the spectacle of the doubts, the vacillations, the gropings in the dark, the shilly-shallyings, of Joffre, Foch and Nivelle and all the other French military chiefs, whom he had watched from so near at hand. In his book he depicts for us their anxious and conscientious zeal, marred always by irretrievable mediocrity, and he deduces, quite wrongly, from the fact that in this war there were no great generals, no men of military genius, that there were no great generals, no men of military genius, in any war.

MUSSOLINI IN OCTOBER 1904

From a copy of a photograph inscribed "To my Mother—Thanks and Memories".

In England, after the tragic death of Kitchener, there were capable and brave leaders in plenty, but again there was no sign of a genius or of a hero. Two civilian Ministers, Lloyd George in England, Clemenceau in France, took the place that should have been held by the soldiers, and the fact that they controlled the actual operations in the field was perhaps not the least of the reasons why these operations continued so long and were characterized by such desolating indecision. The Allies were not more lacking in strategy than were Hindenburg and Ludendorff: both of them diligent students of tactics. Strategy is something more—something unattainable by mere study and diligence. It is a gift to which a man is born and which he develops.

For a brief period it looked as though Belgium would hold up before our eyes both a Royal Hero and a Religious Martyr. But King Albert confined himself to the sober rôle of a dutiful and courageous monarch—a gallant gentleman standing by his plighted word; while the Germans, held back by well-grounded fear, robbed Cardinal Mercier of the glory of martyrdom. The incidents in which Cardinal Mercier and Nurse Cavell and Burgomaster Max of Brussels stood out so nobly resolved themselves into mere episodes of the war. More arresting, more sensational, was the apparition of Gabriele d'Annunzio. Wonderful already as seer and poet, as a soldier he was no less wonderful. That was, indeed, a thrilling spectacle: d'Annunzio flying in his aeroplane above Vienna and dropping those incendiary missives of his instead of bombs; d'Annunzio re-enacting the great legendary "Beffa di Buccari" and penetrating in his *Mas* within the enemy's fortifications—and then celebrating the adventure in classic verse; d'Annunzio (the war ended) seizing Fiume with a handful of resolute followers and holding it in defiance of all the Powers of Europe. Marvellous exploits, all of them, marked by fire and daring and originality, but these, also, were in the nature of mere episodes.

On both sides, millions of human beings gave up their lives in the defence of hearth and home and of their native land, actuated and supported by their traditional feelings of duty and patriotism. It was otherwise with the adherents of the creed—not new, but now re-affirmed—that this war was to end all wars and to result in the abolition of the sense of military honour, the cessation of all armed conflicts. Votaries of the International provided no martyrs to their faith to act as a pillar to their Church of the future. It was believed for a time that Liebknecht had been shot for his determined resistance to the war, but all he had to put up with was a brief period of imprisonment. The other Socialist leaders, German and French and Belgian, fought and incited to the fighting. And on the throne of the Pontiff and in the ranks of his great dignitaries, there was no new Saint Leo to dash in unarmed between the opposing armies, and, threatening excommunication from the Church, to impose peace upon the fratricidal sons of Christ.

We all sought to create heroes for ourselves, worthy of our worship, but in vain.

It seemed as though materialism were in the ascendant, with its negation of free will and its belief in blind chance, when suddenly there came an awakening of the spirit. Had not all men alike been in the trenches? Had not one and all been moved by the same instincts to face death for the common cause? Would not one stand for all? Thus musing, the nations singled out for their ideal of heroism the humble figure of the Unknown Warrior. He stood for the millions who had promised nothing but who gave everything, selfless, untiring, ubiquitous. In all lands the whole army saw itself in him, every mother mourned in him her own son. In him the obscure, ant-like fighters in the trenches found at once their symbol and their apotheosis.

CHAPTER II

THE MUSSOLINI FAMILY—LIFE IN THE ROMAGNA

Alessandro Mussolini, Blacksmith and Innkeeper—The Romagna : a Land of Easy-going Habits and Warm Emotions.

ONCE the fighting was over and the air had been clarified, we began to realize that what had happened to Europe was, as it were, an earthquake—a revolutionary cataclysm ; and that a new social order had evolved therefrom—a new social order with new leaders.

At the extreme North of the Continent and at the extreme South two men had appeared upon the scene and had begun to dominate it. They differed from each other like cold and heat, like the desolation of the steppes and the beneficence of the Italian sun, like the swelling cupolas of the Kremlin and the classic columns of the Forum : Lenin the Asiatic and Mussolini the European : the one come to demolish, the other to reconstruct. And yet, different as they were, the two were working, perhaps without realizing it, to the same end. To the devout optimist, believing in God, it may seem that these two men not merely came but were sent—that they both had for mission the renewal of the life of their peoples. Lenin, maybe took in hand again the old task of Europeanizing Russia After countless disappointments and disasters Russia has shaken off the sluggish bureaucracy of the Romanoffs and returned to the absolute and patriarchal tyranny under which—as for instance in the reign of Peter the Great—she knew her greatest days : the only kind of rule, probably, for which she is yet fitted, though it may well be that she is on the eve of a new dawn.

Just as Lenin was an archetype of the Tartar, so Benito Mussolini is an archetype of the Italian—he is a Roman from top to toe and to the marrow of his bones. He comes of an old Emilian stock. As with so many old Italian families, the name derives from the handicraft or trade they followed—they were called Mussolini because they either made or dealt in *mussolina*, muslin : a material brought to Europe from Mossoul in Asia by the Crusaders. There is still in Bologna a Via dei Mussolini and there used to be a Mussolini Tower. In the thirteenth century, in the great days of the Italian Communes, the Mussolini of Bologna were Captains of the People—*Capitani del Popolo*. Not a great deal, probably, is remembered by most foreigners of that brilliant era in Italian history. After the long lethargy of the Mediæval Age, the first germs of the Renaissance had begun to move in France, but this had been a *Vorfrühling* merely, as the Germans say : the new Spring-time was to come in Italy—the Italy of the Communes. The Commune of Bologna was among the foremost of them and was a stronghold of the arts ; to its famous University flocked scholars from every corner of Europe. Bologna was a city of towers and fortresses, moreover, able to guard itself from jealous rivals.

To be a *Capitano del Popolo* in such a Commune at such a period was to be a man of mark indeed : a soldier, certainly, and also a judge, often a legislator as well. He represented both the civil and the military power of the place, and if he wished to cope with the plotters and conspirators who were ever on the alert to overthrow him he had need to be a judge of men and to combine shrewdness with courage.

We do not know and have no means of ascertaining whether the worthy Alessandro Mussolini, first blacksmith, afterwards innkeeper, in the hamlet of Varano di Costa, situated on the slope of a hill near Dovia, in the village known as Predappio, in the Romagna, was

a direct descendant of the proud Bolognese Mussolini of the thirteenth century. In those turbulent times, it was no rare thing for a great family, when crushed by some hostile faction, to lose its home and wealth and to see its fortunes darkened in exile for many decades. The prouder the plume, the greater the peril. Thus it was that many aristocratic houses came to mingle with the populace, enriching it with their culture and refinement and borrowing from it new strength.

But at all events this Alessandro Mussolini, although a manual worker and of plebeian status, was not an uneducated man ; there was nothing vulgar or uncouth about him. While still a mere youth he had become implicated in the political trials which followed the first manifestations of Socialism and Internationalism in Italy. He had undergone a term of three years' imprisonment, as having been an associate of Bakunin and also of Andrea Costa, who was Italy's first apostle of revolutionary Socialism and who was particularly active in the Romagna, a country of warm-blooded folk and always a hot-bed of revolution and sedition. Costa's comrade and friend, the young and beautiful Russian Nihilist, Anna Kuliscioff, a romantic and fascinating figure, was to become later the soul of Italian Socialism and to exercise an immense secret influence over the entire life of the country.

Thus Alessandro Mussolini was not just a common soldier in the fray, but a standard-bearer. An Internationalist first, a Republican afterwards, he was an ardent partisan, like every son of the Romagna who respects himself.

Here I must indulge in a digression in order to enable my readers to form some notion of what the Romagna really is. It is a singular region, ethnically distinct from the rest of Italy although in the centre of the country and without clearly defined boundaries. Ferrara, for instance, is by some people reckoned as part of it, by others not. There are some even who

declare that Bologna, the capital of Emilia, belongs to it, but this is not so. Dante spoke truly of it as lying—*Tra 'l Po e il monte e la marina e il Reno.*

Foreigners generally ignore the Romagna, with the exception, of course, of the famous city of Ravenna, the Italian capital of the Byzantine Empire. The rest of the Romagna has little of historical interest to attract visitors. Its main preoccupation has been with politics, and what it has had to show for itself has been human beings and all that was necessary to make human life happy and prosperous. One of our famous writers, Massimo d'Azeglio, went so far as to declare that nowhere else did the human plant flourish so splendidly as in the Romagna. Many other plants thrive to the utmost upon this fertile soil, which is cultivated like a garden. Its golden corn-fields spread out to the horizon. Vineyards may be seen in every direction, and the wine they yield, red or white, is light and with a pleasant sting in it. The Romagna, in truth, is as famous for its wealth and variety of country-produce as for the abundance of good fish harvested along its coast.

The people of the Romagna are workers but they know also how to enjoy themselves. The *Romagnolo* is deeply attached to his land, to his house, to his womenfolk, and scarcely less so to the wine of the country, to the local methods of cooking and to all the time-honoured customs of his ancestors. Unlike the inhabitants of other parts of Italy, he has no inclination to emigrate, either for good or temporarily, and this is one of the chief causes of his revolutionary temperament. He wants work on the spot, and when he does not find it, he curses at the Government and agitates until, somehow or other, work is found for him. The famous "Red Co-operatives" of the Romagna owed their existence to this, and to this also are traceable all the other subversive Labour movements of which one has read. The *Romagnolo* pays no heed to the so-called laws of demand and supply or those that affect the rise and fall in produce prices. He

is out to upset these laws for his own benefit and with the help of the political authorities. The threshing-machine reduces the number of men wanted to thresh the corn, so down with the threshing-machine ! Republicans and Socialists, the men of the Romagna are chiefly concerned with their own interests.

San Marino, the famous little Republic, a survival of the thirteenth-century Communes, still independent and autonomous, is the Romagna's one great curiosity, as Ravenna is its one famous city. This strange little mountain State is visible from every direction and the sight of it means much to the home-loving countryfolk. Giovanni Pascoli speaks of the Romagna as the country in which, wander where you will, you are accompanied by the " azure vision of San Marino "—

Il paese ove, andando, ci accompagna
L'azzurra vision di San Marino.

Among the rights claimed by the Republic is that of offering an asylum to Italian exiles and political prisoners of every description. The Romagna is a region which cherishes a strong regard for the political freedom of the individual. A good illustration of this is offered by the treatment accorded to Garibaldi in 1848 when he had fled from Rome, the Pope having returned thither in triumph. Garibaldi, bound for Venice which was still defending itself against Austria, and to the support of which he was hastening, made his way through Romagna alone, an outlaw with a price upon his head, and with persecution and ruin threatening anyone who should help him. He was retarded and impeded on his journey by the mortal illness of his heroic wife, Anita, who presently died in his arms in a little disused cottage wherein they had found shelter.

His movements were known to all in the Romagna, which was under Papal rule, yet no word went forth on the subject, and everywhere he found warm hearts and

generous friends. In the whole region there was not a single spy or traitor to put his pursuers upon his track. Treachery, in truth, like cowardice, is a vice repugnant in the extreme to these people. Their code of honour is primitive and rudimentary ; like all primitive folk they are guided by their instincts more than by reasoning or reflection ; but there is a rooted hatred in them for traitors and cowards and weaklings. Strength and courage are the things they most respect—strength and courage, physical above all, moral and spiritual as a natural result. Towards women the Romagnese show themselves considerate and chivalrous. The woman who *wishes* to be respected will nowhere meet with more respect. In fact, in many districts, the *padrona di casa*, the mistress of the house, the *Arzdora*—to give her the local name—is a kind of benevolent despot, reminiscent of the ancient Greek types made familiar to us by Homer. Her authority is uncontested and respected by all, not least by her husband who knows better than to trespass upon her province. I believe that Penelope in Ithaca lived very much the same kind of existence as these good dames : sewing, weaving, looking after the servants, in fact presiding over the whole life of the farm, the milking of the cows, the making of butter and cheese, the killing and curing of the pigs. Her day's work done, she will take a look at her neighbours' fields and vineyards, noting how they compare with her own. Her family are immune against the cold winds of winter for they are all protected by the wool from her own sheep. She is, in fact, quite a Biblical figure.

But the less patriarchal pages of the Bible—the pages warm with passion like the Song of Solomon—are also reproduced in the life of the Romagna and there is something like an echo of them in the *canzoni* and *stornelli* (three-line verses, these) which are continually upon the lips of young men and girls alike. For this rich, warm soil gives birth to warm passions—healthy passions impatient of all restrictions. It is a country of

fierce loves, and no shame is felt over them. Beauty is admired as a sign of strength and health. All eyes smile upon the youth courting the maid, all hearts go out to him. Jealousy is a disease understood and pitied, for whoever loves wants his woman all to himself. Blame and contempt are reserved for the false or calculating or miserly.

CHAPTER III

THE VILLAGE CLUB

The Republican Innkeeper—A Disciple of Mazzini—The Signora Rosa—*Una Donna all' Antica.*

WITH so much a-doing in the political world of Italy, we can imagine something of the life led thirty or forty years ago by Signor Alessandro Mussolini, former revolutionary and political prisoner, now blacksmith and innkeeper in that hamlet of Dovia, and, for a while, in addition, Mayor of the district. An inn is at once the poor man's club and his Debating Society and, as we all know, the best imaginable glass of wine is all the better for being accompanied by a hot-and-strong discussion with thumps on the table, and, to clinch the arguments, a few good round oaths.

Signor Alessandro, besides being an excellent blacksmith, knew how to intervene impartially in these disputations with a frank outspoken eloquence, not devoid of wit and culture—the outcome of his readings in prison ; and he was careful to serve good wine. His favourite brands were the sweet and golden Albana and the sparkling ruby-hued Sangiovese from the hills. A big, stout man, sanguine and jovial, he was at heart, although an Internationalist, something of a disciple of Mazzini. The Mazzinian party, although the most sterile, was the purest of the old political groups in Italy, the only one of them which maintained itself uncontaminated by parliamentary intrigues and election-

eering trickeries, and which still held aloft the banner of the ideal.

The innkeeper of Dovia, cordial and convivial, instead of saving his money, used to keep open house like the genuine idealist he was. He was equally happy working lustily at his anvil or emptying a tumbler with his friends. He gave little heed to the matter of payment and often his guests were regaled, free of cost, with food as well as drink. This was so especially on Committee days, or when any kind of conference was on, and at Election time. On such occasions Signor Alessandro would come back home with a whole troop of colleagues and boon companions and there would be much merry-making without any money changing hands. He would scout the idea of his guests paying their way.

Sitting quietly in her corner of the house would be the delicate figure of a woman, pale of face and somewhat worn-looking, uttering no words of protest but worried manifestly by all the clamour and all the idle talk, and troubled at heart to see her too good-natured husband thus "put upon."

This was Signor Alessandro's wife, the Signora Rosa, who while still in her early youth was thought of all over the village almost as a saint from Heaven, so gentle and refined she was, so different from all the others of her circle. The Signora Rosa, a bundle of nerves controlled by an indomitable will and disguised beneath a tranquil and smiling countenance, was a woman of extraordinary energy. She was the schoolmistress of the village and held her classes in the inn itself, in the rooms above the smithy ; the hammering from below and the sound of the bellows acted as a kind of rhythmical accompaniment to her quiet voice as she imparted to her scholars the little bits of learning which they were capable of taking in. To know Benito Mussolini aright, one needs to conjure up a picture of his mother as she sat there teaching in her school, an incarnation of gentle goodness and unconscious nobility, reserved, retiring,

sensitive in the extreme. *Una donna all' antica*, she was called by the people of the neighbourhood ; a blend of all the more austere virtues was what they meant, a compendium of all that went to make the ideal Roman matron of ancient times.

CHAPTER IV

THE RESTLESS FLAME

A "Sunday's Child"—Paternal Punishments—How a Deputy handled the Bellows—Benito Mussolini on His Father.

A VERY naughty troublesome little boy Benito seems to have been, ready for every kind of mischief. In that village schoolroom in the inn, presided over by his mother, he was as often as not on all fours underneath the benches pinching the bare legs of the other boys and girls. His face frightened them whenever he wanted a thing, so determined he looked, with his immense, dark, shining eyes beneath the big bulging forehead. One little girl, the prettiest in the class, stood in peculiar terror of him. He would be on the watch for her in the fields, behind a bush, on her way to school and would spring out upon her suddenly. He would forbid her to cry and she had to go with him meekly, a bit fascinated, no doubt, as well as dominated, perhaps a little proud too at being selected for persecution by the son of the schoolmistress. Seven years old, she was woman enough to enjoy being tyrannized over by this young man of five. Of a sudden he would kiss her, next moment catching hold of her two long plaits of hair and making her play at being a horse while he drove her. Then, no less suddenly, he would tire of the game and say to her in his quick brusque way: "Now be off—off you go!" And off she had to go demurely to her lesson.

The boy was born on July 29th, 1883, a bright warm Sunday, while all the church bells were ringing—a "Sunday Child" like Goethe, who, it will be remembered, cherished the old legend that a "Sonntags Kind"—

un bambino della domenica, to give the Italian name—was destined always to meet with a happy fate and to achieve success in everything.

We shall hear now something of what Benito himself recalled of these days of childhood—recollections written down in prison, the only place wherein he has ever had leisure to reflect upon the past and to look into the workings of his own mind.

Gifted with a wonderful memory not only for what has happened to himself but for historical events, Mussolini could hold forth unceasingly about the past, did he choose to do so, but he does not. Now and again he makes a start, but before the tale is well begun, he stops, saying : " But, there ! I don't know what I'm talking about—I remember nothing. The past does not exist for me. I am interested only in the future."

Perhaps it is because the past brings back with it feelings of sadness that he pulls up short in this fashion. If he were to indulge too much in these recollections, they might weaken his power of decision. The man of action, as Hamlet knew, must keep control of his dreams and imaginings—resist " the pale cast of thought."

Here, then, without further preface, is a passage from Mussolini's own account of his earliest years :

" I was born on a Sunday, at two o'clock in the afternoon, the fête of the patron saint of the parish. . . . The sun had entered within the constellation of Leo eight days before.

" My father's name was Alessandro. He had never been to school. When he was barely ten years old he was sent to Dovadola, a place not far away, as an apprentice to the blacksmith there. From Dovadola he was moved on to Meldola where, during the years 1875–80, he became familiar with the ideas of the Internationalists. Then, a full-blown blacksmith, he opened his own shop at Dovia, a village which did not boast a very good reputation. The people there were quarrelsome. My father found plenty of work, however, and began to spread the

Internationalist doctrines. He founded a group there which soon had many members but which later was broken up by the police and dispersed.

" In my fifteenth year I began to learn how to read and soon I read quite well. Of my grandfather I retain only a vague, fleeting impression. My grandmother I loved. After I had reached sixteen, I went to school from six o'clock until nine, first to my mother's, then to the school of Siliro Maroni, at Predappio. I was a restless and pugnacious boy. More than once I came back home with my head bleeding from a blow with a stone. But I knew how to defend myself.

" I was an audacious young buccaneer. During holiday-time I used to arm myself with a little spade and, together with my brother, Arnaldo, I used to spend my time working along the riverside. Once I got hold of some decoy-birds which had been set in a snare. I had a tremendous run for it to escape from the infuriated owner and had to ford the river, but I did not relinquish my booty.

" I was very fond of birds and in particular of a certain breed of small owls. I kept up my religious practices side by side with my mother who was a devout believer, and my grandmother, but I never could remain long in church especially when the great ceremonies were on. The lights from the candles, the penetrating odour from the incense, the colours of the sacred vestments, together with all the long-drawn-out singing of the congregation and the sound of the organ, disturbed me profoundly."

Later, the youth with the formidable wide-open eyes was put to blowing the bellows in his father's smithy. Alessandro Mussolini was a good father and solicitous for his son's welfare, but he was severe and if the boy did not mind his work he would be given a sharp smack over the head to make him keep a look-out. Sometimes he would come in for an additional cuff if he closed his eyes or if he seemed to wince from fear of the sparks or of the red-hot anvil. " You'll never learn in that

way!" the smith would mutter. For more serious shortcomings a strap would be brought into play.

Rough countryman that he was himself, Alessandro Mussolini knew that life was apt to be a hard and pitiless master and that whoever would stand up against the fates and not let them conquer him must learn to become hard and to undergo discipline. Better a blow to-day from your father than two blows from a stranger to-morrow! But the young lion's whelp did not relish it always and would sometimes make away. On one occasion, after a beating, he was not to be seen again until late at night, when he crept back home and went straight to bed. The mother, with her blending of tenderness and quiet firmness, knew better how to manage him. She appealed to those instincts of veneration for motherhood which so often stamp really masculine minds.

But although he was a prey to distractions in the smithy, young Benito was an efficient help to his father on the whole, full of intelligence and very quick and alert. He was fascinated (and still is) by everything in the nature of mechanism, as in everything that had to do with man's power over Nature.

Many years later—in fact not very many years ago—the founder, proprietor, and controlling editor of a great daily paper in Milan, a man already famous, to boot, as a political leader, was driving his motor-car along the dusty roads of Lombardy. He amused himself, while somewhat startling his companions, though they also were no muffs, by the risks he took as the car dashed along. He had but recently learnt to drive and he was conducting himself like a case-hardened expert. But then he had previously done some flying and even nose-diving, so the danger of mere motoring seemed child's play to him even at the start. Indeed, it was only because he had injured himself flying and incapacitated himself for further adventures in the air that he had become reconciled to putting up with this terrestrial sport. As things were, there was more of the airman about him

than the normal motorist, and the car suffered, for it was made to execute effects which seemed more suited to the high heavens than to *terra firma*. At last, in the midst of a particularly wild whirl something snapped! The damage was not great, but the grown-up baby had for the moment spoilt his new toy and there was nothing for him to do, apparently, but take it at a snail's pace to the nearest garage, to see what could be done to mend it.

It was a Saint's Day of some kind and the streets of the town were all hung with pennants and festoons, and the entire population was out of doors. There seemed to be no garage anywhere and the one smithy was shut up. However, the smith was routed out, and although he was in his best clothes, he was all eagerness to help. His fire was extinguished, however, and there was metal to be soldered. Here was Mussolini's chance—for the motorist-aviator was none other. You should have seen how he worked the bellows first, and then, when the fire was alight again, how he handled the hammer and managed the whole job! His friends marvelled, and as for the blacksmith, he hailed the new customer as a past-master in his own art. I really believe Mussolini was prouder of this achievement than of his most brilliant triumphs in the Chamber. It was the only occasion on which I have ever seen him childishly vain-glorious. "I will tell you who I am," he exclaimed to the smith, "so that you may sing my praises!" Truly, if in the old days it had cost him something to learn the blacksmith's business all his pains seemed now to have been rewarded!

To his father's memory Mussolini penned a fine tribute when in the course of time, in November, 1910, death took him. It appeared in *La Lotta di Classe*—a journal Mussolini founded—and ended thus:

"He did good to his comrades and to his adversaries. His life in many respects had been one of

sorrow. His end came all too soon. Of worldly goods he left nothing; of spiritual goods he has left a treasure : the treasure of an idea.

And now, the moment of mourning over, life must move on again upon its way and with all its duties."

CHAPTER V

THE BOY, FATHER TO THE MAN

Benito Juarez and Benito Mussolini—A Despotic Protector—A First Experience of Treachery—A Significant Exploit.

HE was called Benito after Benito Juarez, the Mexican Revolutionary who led a revolt against the Emperor Maximilian. Later there came a little girl, Edvige, and, between the two, another boy called Arnaldo, after Arnaldo da Brescia, another Revolutionary hero, a martyr to the cause of civil and religious liberty in the struggle with the Pope. Arnaldo Mussolini was eventually to become the modest and courageous editor of the *Popolo d' Italia*, in succession to Benito, who had to relinquish the post after the Fascist uprising of October, 1922. Arnaldo was a quiet, rather fat, little boy, somewhat short-sighted, unassuming—as he has always remained; above all, devoted to the big brother who alternately bullied and caressed him, at once his protector and his despotic master.

It was when he was seven that Benito experienced his first disillusion. A threshing-machine was at work and all the boys of the village were revelling in the sight. Benito, who was among them, had got hold of a wheelbarrow, when suddenly a bigger lad called out to him to come and play. Benito ran up trustfully, only to receive a treacherous blow in the face from the other, who made off with the wheelbarrow at once.

It was the boy's first encounter with gratuitous perfidy; the first, but not the last. It was a blow to his innermost feelings. On more than one occasion I have seen Mussolini bitter, his face livid, with a look of misery, almost desperation, on it. This was never

owing to mere mishaps or failures. He is not thus moved even by the upsetting of long-laid plans. He shrugs his shoulders resignedly or else laughs with that robust laughter of his, quite unshaken in his self-confidence. Mussolini's laugh comes rarely, but it is hearty in the extreme—his shoulders heave—he laughs with his whole body. But this hardened man, accustomed to the "slings and arrows" of political life, with all its insincerities and duplicities, and himself inclined at times to play the cynic, suffers intensely from anything like perfidious conduct. He endeavours, indeed, to abstain from friendships lest the weapon of personal affection—the only weapon he fears—should be treacherously used against him. When this does happen, and when, as he says he feels "ashes in the mouth," his rage is terrible.

And yet—so full of contradictions is he—he is quick to pardon anyone who at heart has been faithful to him (the word *fidele*, faithful, has always been dear to him). Mussolini pardons almost any shortcoming.

That first piece of treachery, as I have said, hurt him profoundly—the treachery meant much more to him than the mere blow and the bruise. He returned to his home weeping and met his father. "Who was it hit you?" his father asked. "Oh, a bigger boy, was it? But you didn't hit back! And now you come here blubbering like a woman! Off with you! Don't let me see you again until you have had a go at him!" Young Benito dried his tears and pondered the matter. Presently he found a biggish stone, which he sharpened carefully, and before supper-time he had routed out his assailant and had his revenge. "You cut open my face," the small boy shouted; "mind out for your own!" And he hit his foe on the head with the stone once, twice, thrice! . . . Even now Mussolini smiles with a certain pleasure and pride when his thoughts go back to that day. "We must not put up with bullying!" he remarks. "We must never stand it, not from any-

body. Whoever puts up with bullying is a coward." He does not believe that the assertion of the rights of man is compatible with the turning of the other cheek or with the Tolstoian doctrine of no resistance. Fascism is but the putting into practice on a large scale of the doctrine inculcated by Benito's father. We must not always be looking to our own paternal government; we must not always be running to it, shirking our own responsibility.

Certain Fascists, it is true, go too far—they practically deny the collective authority of the State. They adopt force as a regular policy, instead of reserving it for purposes of defence and for exceptional circumstances. "Force should only be used surgically," Mussolini was wont to say and write and preach and practise. "Force should never be used provocatively, it should never be the rule : it should be an episode not a system." And when he assumed the reins of Government he would say to his Prefects :

"In doubtful cases, when there is danger of ferment and riots, use your authority. Have no fears. Do not hesitate to put people in prison. Rather twenty safely imprisoned than one killed out in the open. The twenty will be set free again two days later."

The childhood of a great man is never really happy; the necessary subordination to his elders is in conflict always with the craving for supremacy inherent in his nature; and the latent forces on a leash within him prevents him from enjoying things quietly like ordinary children. An incurable restlessness took early possession of Benito, and we are told how he would throw himself into tasks and occupations quite beyond his age and capacity. Once, for instance, as he was sitting at home, looking out towards a distant hill, he caught sight of an elderly *contadino* named Filippone, hoeing in a field. Like a dart, Benito flew to the spot, nearly a mile away, and having reached it, he took the hoe from the old

man's hands and set to work, without a word of explanation, almost without looking at him. Presently, having completed the job, sweating now at every pore, and pleasantly tired, he made off again almost as suddenly, with just a word of farewell to Filippone, who, after the first moment of astonishment, had been quite content philosophically to become a spectator instead of an actor and had sat down to smoke his pipe. If the boy liked to do the work he for his part most certainly saw no objection!

One other story from this period must be told. Benito, as leader of all the marauding expeditions of the neighbourhood, had given the word of command for a raid upon a certain apple tree which leant temptingly over the wall of a farm not far away—a wonderful tree with a wealth of splendid fruit on it. The *contadino* to whom it belonged, angered by the audacity of this enterprise, loaded his gun and fired at the small boy whose task it was to climb up and shake the branches, and brought him down, wounded in the leg. All the others made off, scattered like sparrows by a stone. *All but one!* Benito, like the true leader he already was, went to the rescue of the wounded lad who was all but unconscious, his leg bleeding profusely. Without heeding the shouts of the *contadino*, who was still in a fury, and who had his gun still handy, Benito, anxious and earnest, lifted the boy on to his shoulders and carried him home. Having done so, his next concern was to punish his timorous companions! They all paid dearly for their cowardice. This, perhaps, may be called Mussolini's first appearance in the rôle of Fascist!

CHAPTER VI

MUSSOLINI'S BEGINNINGS AS AN EDITOR

Mussolini's Fame in Predappio—His Rise and Fall in Popularity—His Journal, *Il Popolo d' Italia*—A Remarkable Newspaper Office—The Bombs in the Bookcase—A Centre of Unrest.

SOUVENT femme varie, but the moods of the populace are almost as uncertain. Indeed, the courtier of King Demos is even more wretched than that poor man who "hangs on princes' favours."

Mussolini was already the pride of his native Predappio when in 1910 he became at once a Socialist leader and the founder and editor of the combative little weekly journal, *La Lotta di Classe*, at Forli; and his popularity there continued during the next four years, in the course of which he grew powerful enough to drive out of the party its hitherto dominant figure, Leonido Bissolati. Not long afterwards—while he was still only twenty—he was appointed editor of the party's chief organ, *Avanti*. But Predappio, in common with the mass of the Italian proletariat, began to hate and vilify him from the moment, towards the end of 1914, when, having begun to write in favour of Italy's intervention in the War, he was formally expelled from the Socialist ranks; and it continued so to do, alike when he himself joined the army and when, back again from the trenches and out of hospital, his heart fuller than ever of love for his country and of fervour in the cause of her greatness, he exerted himself to free her from her internal enemies and to demolish the countless hydra-heads of chaos and anarchy.

To-day Mussolini is not Predappio's pride merely,

but its idol. He reigns in the hearts of the whole of Fascist Italy, the whole of young Italy, but in Predappio he rules. Predappio is his citadel. All the Romagnese, but above all the people of Predappio and Forli, hold their heads some inches higher for the thought that Benito Mussolini—"our Benito"—is one of them.

The Predappio folk, out of a fund subscribed locally, bestowed on him the house in which he was born, the modest home of his parents; and the raising—within a few weeks—of the 20,000 lire required for this purpose was no small thing in a village community. The house is preserved as a shrine, while his mother's tomb is kept covered with flowers. His arrival in Predappio in the April of 1923, after his accession to power, was a veritable triumphal entry. They carried him shoulder-high, and all wanted to shake his hand.

"Do you remember me, Benito?" was the cry on every side.

Very different was the situation from 1914 to 1922. In the whole of Predappio the newly-born Fascist Party did not get a single vote either in the communal or in the parliamentary elections—an unusual state of affairs anywhere in Italy even then. *Avanti* printed the news very conspicuously and we of Mussolini's new organ, *Il Popolo d'Italia*, posted up the cutting from *Avanti* on what we called our *Colonna infame*—of which more anon!

We lived, we members of the staff, in a state of fraternal and at the same time Bohemian intimacy that did one's heart good. Four miserable little rooms we had, a wretched little hole of a place, in a hovel in one of the lowest streets in an old slum in Milan, and yet what joy, what fervour, what high hopes were ours! And what fun we had to distract and rest us in the midst of all our preoccupation and hard work!

In Mussolini's own particular sanctum, a very poky little den indeed, there was just room for his writing-desk, two chairs and a bookcase, which was usually fuller of

bombs than of books! Fortunately the glass doors of the case—when they did not happen to be broken, and it was difficult not to break them, there was so little room to turn in—fortunately, as I say, they were opaque and the bombs could not be seen. There were times, indeed, when the bombs were transferred to the stove! That was when we had got wind of a projected visit of the police. One morning, the office-boy, all unconscious of danger, was about to light the fire in the stove, just then full of bombs. Luckily we were in time to stop him. Another moment and the entire building would have been blown to atoms!

We had several such scenes. And there were other kindred alarms. One day Mussolini, contrary to his custom, began to smoke. Presently while he was talking, he put down his cigarette, still alight, alongside a match-box on top of the object lying nearest to his hand on the writing-desk which was covered with all sorts of things —a heap of visiting cards, bundles of letters and papers, pages of an article half-written, a dagger, two revolvers, and some books, among them a volume of Heine's poems and one of Carducci's, inseparable companions, and finally the never-failing cup of milk which constituted the Editor's lunch when his labours were more than usually strenuous and when political events were following thick upon each other's heels. Hanging upon the wall was the banner of the *Arditi*, with its great white skull on a black ground; beside it, the helmet and yellow leathern jacket which Mussolini had worn while learning aviation. The floor was strewn with newspapers of all sorts which had been looked through and thrown aside—French, German, Spanish, English, American and from all parts of Italy. But that metal object!—its nature will have been guessed. It was a bomb—one of three *Sipe* bombs (a species which explode with unusual ease) that were lying handy in case of an attack upon our offices which had been threatened by "the Enemy"—the Enemy being the Chamber of

Labour and the controllers of *Avanti*. They were continually threatening us, but they never came.

On this occasion, luckily, I was present in the room. "*Direttore!*" I exclaimed, "do you really think a bomb is quite a suitable thing to put a lighted cigarette on?" Mussolini turned on me a look of amused surprise and took up the cigarette again quietly. Then we both laughed. But another member of the staff who just then came in and whom we tried to get to enter into the joke paled perceptibly and could only achieve a very sickly smile.

The second chair in the Editor's sanctum, the visitors' chair, was not a chair merely but a barometer, indicating fair weather or foul. When the weather was fair—that is, when Mussolini was feeling amiably disposed to his visitors, this chair, almost knock-kneed from its burden of blue-books, pamphlets, and periodicals, was ceremoniously placed at their disposal. More often the weather was foul. "When they have to stand," Mussolini would say, "people don't gabble so much and you get rid of them quicker." At election time, the chair was taken right away, for the Editor's sanctum was then besieged by bores, chiefly candidates "on the make" and would-be candidates seeking support, among them long-bearded, bald-headed, short-sighted professors of a type particularly obnoxious to Mussolini. Kept standing there, these "*scocciatori*"——these "infernal nuisances" as you might say in English—were easily dealt with. As an additional deterrent, Mussolini had this frank notice nailed up outside his door:

> "*Chi entra mi fa onore,*
> *Chi non entra mi fa piacere!*"

which may be translated:

> "Whoever comes in does me honour,
> Whoever does not come in gives me pleasure!"

When the visitors were persons really deserving of

consideration—I mean by reason of their individual qualities, not of their official standing or their titles—or when they were personal friends, they were asked to sit down either upon the chair already mentioned or upon a heap of books. "Be so good as to take a seat, Signora," would be the formula sometimes, "upon all these products of the human intelligence!" And Mussolini would continue: "And now be kind and talk to me about interesting things! I am tired. Tell me interesting things that will rest and refresh me!"

Mussolini's method of securing rest and refreshment has usually meant the putting of a new strain upon his tired nerves. As recently as September, 1923, for instance, being worn out by the immense nervous tension caused by the Ruhr problem, the Greco-Italian diplomatic conflict, and the Jugo-Slav attitude towards Fiume; not having been able to sleep for two or three nights owing to the constant ringing of the telephone bell by his bedside, followed by the consideration of grave messages despatched to him by cipher and the dictating of orders and instructions in reply; made really ill by all this, and with a high temperature, Mussolini decided at last to "take a rest." The "rest" consisted in a sudden rush to Milan, the starting of a motor race, the opening of a new club, and the delivering of a speech.

A few weeks earlier, after a similar long stretch of intensely hard work, he "took a rest" in the Abruzzi in the shape of two entire days devoted to receptions and inaugurations, the whole of the third day from 7 a.m. to 9 p.m. being spent on the return journey up hill and down dale to Rome, sometimes at a rate of 70 miles an hour! His companions were utterly exhausted by the experience and good for nothing next day.

To look on at Mussolini and his methods is to become convinced of the truth of relativity. Time does not really exist, what exists is the energy of the molecules of which our human machinery is composed and which

stretch out what we call "time" indefinitely. It is impossible that the two hours of a morning which the idler spends playing at dominoes in a provincial café or glancing through a newspaper, or which an elegant lady takes over dressing herself, can be the same space of time as that during which the Italian Premier contrives to have his midday meal, telephone orders to a Prefect, scour all the Italian daily newspapers, visit the Palazzo Chigi, dictate despatches to the Ambassadors, dispose of half a dozen troublesome visitors, and discuss various important problems with colleagues or friends.

"To take rest," for Mussolini often means indulgence, in one way or another, in the art of fencing: if with actual foils or *épées*, so much the better; but failing them, with the parry and thrust of ideas.

Occasionally, in that squalid old house in which we had our offices, the Editor when he was in a good humour would open the door of his sanctum and make his way into the *sala di redazione*, as it was grandly called, the general editorial room, and open a debate. "Full sittings" we had always, some of us perched on the long table, which was covered with ink-stains like a school bench and slashed and carved with penknives; some of us on the window-sills; as many as could crowd together upon the six available chairs; Mussolini would keep on his feet. A supplementary audience was provided by occupants of the other houses at our back leaning out of the windows which gave upon the dark and narrow shaft-like courtyard and by the women upon the adjoining roofs, for they would abandon for a while the wringing and hanging out of their clothes to look and listen, marvelling at the way we chattered, like maniacs in a cage. Poor people! I fear they did not find us comfortable neighbours. Every second day they were liable on returning home to find the doors of their houses barred and the entrance to our street closed to traffic by a row of soldiers with bayonets drawn, the ground being covered with straw so that these latter could feed and sleep at their

ease. There was, indeed, less grumbling over this as a rule than excitement and curiosity. What was the matter? Was there a strike on? Or a demonstration? Sometimes it was merely a celebration of some saint from the calendar of Karl Marx. Sometimes it was a question of a Socialist procession filing down the Corso di Porta Romana and advancing towards the Piazza del Duomo and of the danger lest they should come into conflict with the "Interventionist" allies of our papers (the *Fascisti* had not yet been founded). At all the cross-roads troops would be stationed; I remember seeing one day a young recruit, mounted, sharing his ration with his tired and ill-fed horse. "A spoonful to you, a spoonful to me!" he exclaimed, laughing.

We of the *Popolo d'Italia* would send down a bottle of wine occasionally to these gallant lads, who were losing their sleep through no fault of ours. We flattered ourselves that we needed no defenders. Perhaps they were there not so much for our defence, indeed, as for our surveillance.

The public looked on, laughed and shrugged their shoulders and went their way. These social turmoils were things to put up with like rain-storms and hail-storms.

Here and there a shopkeeper, angry over his deserted shop and empty till, would make a bit of a fuss, and I remember one teacher of languages also who in horrible Italian sent in a claim for an indemnity for lessons lost—her pupils would not venture down a barricaded street.

Well, in compensation for these and other vexations, our neighbours were free at least to listen to our discussions, for we kept the windows open, and the court-yard, as already mentioned, was a very confined one—a mere *cavedino*, as they call it in Milan. All the inhabitants of our house were visible and audible to each other on all the floors. In the basement, in a kind of wine-cellar, divided up by wooden partitions, our

"*uffici di amministrazione e di spedizione*" as they were styled, our managerial staff, consisting of two old men and three young girls, craned their necks upwards to follow the proceedings.

To judge by the comments of the *Avanti* and of all the other Socialist weekly journals of Italy at that time you would say that from the day of its birth, November 14th, 1914, the *Popolo* was at the bottom of all the troubles of Europe, from the imminent peril of France to the banking crisis and industrial troubles of Italy. In its every issue the *Avanti* called down imprecations upon the head of the infamous traitor the "paid assassin of the murderous *bourgeoisie*."

The *Avanti* became so popular as the result of this campaign, and came in for so much additional financial support, that it was soon able to acquire a new site and decent printing plant and build itself new offices.

These new offices have since been sold, together with the plant, to the publishers of a group of Fascist periodicals—such is the way of the mob!

Perhaps the most wonderful thing about our house was the stairs. They were so dark and rickety and narrow that it was well to call out if you were mounting and someone else was descending!

But to return to our debates. There were never more than three taking part in them. Mussolini submitted the theme, framing it lucidly upon broad lines. The head of the editorial staff, Michele Bianchi, our faithful "Michelino" as we called him then (later he was to be Commendatore, a Councillor of State, and Secretary-General to the Ministry of Internal Affairs, and a very important personage indeed), followed with comments and criticisms, speaking quietly yet fervently, and with the well-informed common-sense which then won and still keeps his Chief's esteem. Then I would follow with various questions and practical remarks. The others, as in the Socratic dialogues, listened much but said little. When the question under consideration

was particularly interesting and when Mussolini was in one of his best humours, he would himself wind up the debate, emphasizing his points with little raps of pen or pencil, and reducing them down to logical and mathematical formulas of pellucid clearness which he wrote out with his own hand.

It was in this fashion—so he used to tell us—that he had learnt to summarize philosophical, economical and social problems when studying under his teacher, Vilfredo Pareto, at Lausanne, as a University student in the days when he helped to earn his livelihood by working during the summer as a mason and during the winter as a porter in a combined inn and wine-shop in the Grande Rue.

CHAPTER VII

MORE ABOUT THE " POPOLO D' ITALIA "

Our Pillory—*La Colonna Infame*—Quips and Quirks—A Misprint with a Vengeance—Predappio won round again—Mussolini and his Ways—His " Pet Aversions "—Beards and Pomposity—Our New Offices.

A GREAT source of diversion to us all on the staff of the *Popolo d'Italia* was that *Colonna infame* to which I have alluded already. It was a kind of pillory which we instituted upon one of the walls of the editorial room. We posted up on it everything that seemed amusing enough, just as the anonymous wags of Rome used to inscribe their satirical effusions upon the *torso* of the old statue outside the Palazzo Braschi.

It was Mussolini himself who started it in his own writing with the following playful rebuke :

> *" I signori redattori sono pregati di non andarsene prima di esser venuti ! "*

The English equivalent of which would be:

> "Members of the staff are requested not to leave before arriving—or, not to go until they have come!"

Little by little the " column " grew, now a caricature being added to it, now a pungent saying, now a few lines " ragging " a colleague, now a " dig " at one's own self. A favourite vehicle for humour was a certain form of frivolous quatrain well known in Italy and dubbed " Malthusian " because the genre is admitted to be " artistically unproductive." The first line ends always with the words: " quella cosa "—" that thing "—and the last should end with a truncated word. Here is a

classical example—it tells us merely that "A young lady is that thing which goes out walking with her mamma and seems cold, but is soon inflamed when she sees the fine young man"!

"Signorina è quella cosa
Che va a spasso con la mamma.
Pare fredda, ma s'infiamma
Se ti vede il giovanott' !"

We flattered ourselves that we improved upon this in a quip which we perpetrated at the expense of the famous Marinetti, who in 1919 stood for Parliament as a Fascist, but who secured very few votes, his political ambitions being completely nipped in the bud.

Marinetti è quella cosa
Futurismo più cazzotto
Dieci pel, bel giovanotto
*Tarata zumzum zumzum.**

But we were not all wits and rhymsters enough even to achieve such nonsense as this, and the column was eked out with diverting extracts from the countless letters which reached us from all parts of Italy and with typographical misprints and blunders of all kinds. The most sensational and memorable misprint in the entire collection was from our own paper.

The occasion was the arrival of President Wilson in Italy at the period when he had not yet proclaimed himself inimical to our most cherished national aspirations. Mussolini, full of enthusiasm for the Allies, drafted what he meant to be a suitable greeting to the President, to be set in the largest available type, right across the front page of our paper.

It was to read as follows :

WELCOME TO PRESIDENT WILSON IN THE NAME OF

* The purport of this nonsense verse is that Marinetti's noisy Futurism is ridiculous.

THE TRADITIONAL TIES OF DEMOCRACY, STRENGTHENED ON THE BATTLE-FIELDS OF ALL EUROPE.

But at the critical moment of "going to press" some malignant Fate intervened, the second capital "T" was changed to a capital "L," and the greeting to the American President was made in the name of :

"THE TRADITIONAL LIES OF DEMOCRACY"!!!

The *Avanti* was continually supplying us with stuff for the column. Since the fateful 19th of November, 1914, this journal had refrained from so much as mentioning the name of Benito Mussolini, just as the Venetian Republic hid with a black veil the features of the Doge, Marino Faliero; even to-day in the Doges' Palace, you may see that brand of infamy immortalized in the famous picture in the great Council Room. The *Avanti*, however, was not able to maintain so magnificent a pertinacity. On November 18th, 1919, after the elections in which the Fascists had done so badly, the journal of the official Socialist Party came out with the following remark :

> "A corpse in an advanced state of putrefaction was dragged out of the Naviglio yesterday. It was identified as that of Benito Mussolini."

And it was a few days later that our Chief's former journal—the journal which he had raised to such great heights of success—proceeded to draw attention (as already mentioned) to the fact that Mussolini's Party, the Fascists, did not secure a single vote in Predappio: "*dove lo conoscono beni!*"—"where they know him well!"

Mussolini laughed, but I believe that Predappio's attitude really hurt him, for, despite his large views and his habit of subordinating everything to the welfare of

Italy, he cherishes a lasting love for that little homeland of his. An idealist, his ideals are rooted in realities; there is about him nothing of that unbridled fanaticism, devoid of all humanity, which turned Saint-Just into a sanguinary monster. Mussolini remains a man, with all a natural man's feelings for the place where he was born and for the people among whom he was bred.

Standing one day in 1920 in front of this very passage from the *Avanti*, posted up in a place of special honour upon our column, Mussolini admitted to me that he knew he was hated—hated politically, that is—in Predappio. But they had already then begun to admire him there. "He is wrong," they had begun to say, "but he is brave and he has grit in him. He is putting up a big fight. Bravo Benito!"

Nor was this surprising. Mussolini is one of those rare men who are born to compel admiration and devotion from all around them. He is even an exception to the rule that no one is a hero to his valet. Even the humblest members of his staff, though they may not be able to gauge his actions and achievements, come under the sway of his magnetism and the force of his personality. It is wonderful to see how his slightest orders are obeyed. He does not speak loudly or indulge in emphatic language, yet somehow or other it is made clear to all concerned that his decisions are irrevocable—that there must be no discussion of them. Mussolini's intensity and power are manifest in the smallest things no less than in the greatest. *Age quod agis* might be his motto even in croquet and ping-pong! And so great is his concentration that he passes always from one matter to another without ever looking back. The moment one chapter is finished, he is deep in the next. His brain seems constituted in water-tight compartments, as it were. With this peculiarity goes the faculty, invaluable to a statesman, of seeing things as a whole and in correct proportion. Moreover he knows when to rest and does not waste time over futile worries and anxieties. He has the gift

of sleep at will. Half an hour's sleep, or even ten minutes' sleep, will often suffice to refresh him and "set him up." He seems to pass from sleeping to waking at one step, without wasting a moment.

To this faculty for economizing time and energy are due the swiftness and spontaneity of all his resolutions. There is no uncertainty ever about either his words or deeds. It is interesting to note the out-and-out, almost dog-like, devotion which is shown by his body-servant and chauffeur, Cirillo, and which recalls somewhat the jealous, fanatical adoration said to have marked the attitude of the faithful Mameluke Roustan towards Napoleon. In both cases we have that instinctive desire to obey and serve which is so remote from servility, which is, indeed, one of the loftiest and most sacred of human instincts. It has in it a religious element. It constitutes an aureole, as it were, round the head of the true leader of men.

. . . . . .

"*The day the Editor took charge of it himself, the paper went to press punctually: a record to emulate!*" This notice, in bold lettering, and signed MUSSOLINI in capitals, was to be seen one day above the compositors' bench in the printing-office. Mussolini on this occasion had taken a hand in everything—he had even set up some of the type. It was not the only time, indeed, that with his cup of warm milk or glass of cold milk beside him—the two luxuries in which, according to the season, he habitually indulged—he appeared in the *rôle* of compositor, handling the type skilfully, without either mixing up the letters or besmirching his fingers.

After Mussolini, the most important person connected with the paper, the person round whom its firmament revolved, was the Acting-Editor, Giuliani. There were any number of would-be assistant-editors and *soi-disant* contributors. What legions of people there were who on the strength of getting a single article into our

columns went about claiming that they were members of the editorial staff! "I have five thousand editors, don't you know that?" Mussolini once exclaimed impatiently: "Every Italian who has ever been vaccinated claims to be one of them, even people I have never seen, people who can neither read nor write!"

But the type of individual who most infuriated him was, according to his definition, "the humourless, pretentious person," the well-meaning pomposity convinced of "having a mission to save the world 360 times a year!"—"the man with a beard!"—"the heavy-weight imbecile!" These were favourite phrases. "Of course, we are all imbeciles to some extent!" Mussolini would sometimes say: "the great thing is to be light-weight imbeciles. God preserve me from the heavy-weight imbeciles!" As for beards, Mussolini has always abominated them. He has consistently kept his own Roman profile free from one. He thinks of beards as masks for solemn humbugs and second-rate *arrivistes*.

For the old-fashioned, long, full beard he cherishes a special detestation, seeing in it a symbol of all that is unsporting and unprogressive and unpractical. He himself is a Greek in his love of divine levity, perhaps encouraged in this by Nietzsche. He is a Mediterranean and the antithesis of all that is dismal and pedantic. Life, he holds, should either partake of the nature of a great tragedy or else of an Aristophanic farce. The *bourgeois* melodrama offends him alike ethically and artistically. Sometimes he will conclude a diatribe against his "pet aversions"—in particular against sentimentalists and pessimists—by exclaiming: "Life is full of duties to be performed and sorrows to overcome. Dry up your tears and hide them! A truce to mere words!—give us the fruits of experience and bare facts, whether in writing or in talking!"

Dear, comfortless, squalid offices!—it was a real wrench to us at last to leave them. We left a little of our

youth behind us in that dilapidated old house standing almost within the shadows of Milan's great cathedral. How often, as we returned home at night through the silence of the sleeping city, did we listen to the silvery peal of its clock striking the hours. What struggles, sufferings, griefs, joys, does that sound still recall to us! But at least, whether in victory or in defeat, we were always battling, never giving in. There was no scepticism for us, only faith and hope—faith and hope in the future of Italy!

The new offices to which we moved in 1920 were in the Via Lovanio, in a new house in this new street, situated at the corner where it makes an angle with the Via Moscova. They were clean, commodious quarters, well-built and well-equipped, and there was a printing-office on the premises under the direction of a worthy war veteran, Captain Miserocchi, capable and zealous. In what was to be the Editor's room, a spacious apartment with two windows, there were five chairs, one of them a *poltrona*, as we call an easy chair in Italy. "A *poltrona!* A *poltrona!*" shouted Mussolini, when he set eyes on it: "Away with the thing! Easy chairs and slippers (*le poltrone e le pantoffole*) are the ruin of men! Throw it out of the window at once." But this violent measure became unnecessary, for the Chief, to his great satisfaction, got possession, instead, of a vast roofless barn of a place in the unfinished house next door, with a cemented flooring covered only with straw and sacking. Into this house our offices, he decided, were to be transferred presently. Meanwhile this open-air annexe, besides serving as Mussolini's "den," became also his fencing-hall, and every morning we could hear the clash of foils and the accompanying cries of "*In guardia!*"—"*Toccato!*" Mussolini was in his element! Every muscle of his body tense, his eyes fixed, his mouth shut, there was something feline in his methods.

At first we looked askance rather at our new quarters, they were so much grander than the old ones, but the

spirit of the paper and its staff remained the same. We had now, indeed, to fight in bigger battles. Mussolini was to sound the note of Revolution from this new palatial home of ours. It was within these walls we were to receive the telegram in which the King himself confided the government of Italy to our Chief.

Well, the work of the paper is not yet done. In a sense indeed, we are not so much continuing it, as making a fresh start. The seed-time is over but the harvest has yet to be reaped.

CHAPTER VIII

THE STYLE AND THE MAN, AND THE MAN IN THE BOY

We come back to the Seven-year-old Boy—A Defence of this Zigzag Method—The Problem of Unity—The Shepherd's Hut and the Politician's Yearning after Rusticity.

I HAVE realized already, and the fact is now brought home to me once again, that I have digressed and anticipated strangely in this narrative, in defiance of all unities whether of time or place or action.

The harum-scarum boy of whom I was talking a few pages back, the wild and idle but gallant little son of the Dovia blacksmith, was not much over ten years old when we left him; and yet here have I been discoursing of events which happened twenty or twenty-five years later, in as zigzag a fashion as "Tristram Shandy" or "Les Mémoires du Chevalier de Grammont."

In this case also, I feel, the zigzag method is justifiable. The whole world is aware how that boy came to be Prime Minister of Italy : the story of Dick Whittington is not better known and it is impossible for me to proceed by regular stages to a climax as in a romance. I shall not sacrifice to a pedantic chronological unity that more genuine unity which is inherent in the character of my hero.

For young Benito was not merely father to the man, he contained the whole man in germ; and the actions of the boy correspond, upon a vastly different scale, with the unforeseen and apparently inexplicable resolutions of the statesman. The thread of mere chronology seems a poor thing in the face of a unity so substantial, so indestructible, as the tissue of a man's veins and nerves; one cannot take this tissue to pieces. By means of the

interplay of reactions and reflections, on the other hand, it may prove possible to set forth the vital development, by dint of associations, in disregard of the flight of time. There was never a man who, while seeming to change so much, really changed so little. I shall proceed, therefore, as life has done with him and he with life—by leaps and bounds, by rapid advances and sudden retreats.

Connoisseurs of painting know that a good picture is one which imitates with the texture and direction of the stroke of the brush the texture and nature of the thing represented. In the case of a spherical shape, *consistente e corposa*, the right brush-stroke has a certain roundness which gives the impression of a plastic body emerging from out of the shade into the light; and if we are wanting to portray Mussolini, the man forging ahead, restless and dynamic, the man who has said of himself: "*Io sono un Camminante*,"* we must not adopt a static method of painting. The subject of this biography of mine is rectilinear as far as broad lines are concerned and in the nature of his temperament, although—perhaps I should rather say, because—life has driven him hither and thither without giving him peace, without, indeed, his giving peace to himself.

It once happened to a party of us, piloted by Mussolini in the days when he was already a Deputy but not yet Premier, to make an excursion out to Madesimo, a health-resort high up in the Italian Alps. Our car, a feeble machine not equal to the burden we put on it, refused to make the ascent of the steepest incline of all, so we had to proceed on foot over the stony passes, the rocky defiles, and flower-strewn meadows, until we reached the zone of the snow. Ahead of us, on a peak about three miles away, we espied a green field with a tiny house in it, quite isolated, the home of the shepherd whose task it was to mind the flocks grazing here in the

* A persistent wanderer or wayfarer or traveller; one continually "on the move."

summer months. " I want to get up there ! " Mussolini remarked, a moment after he had sat down beside a tree to rest. And he got up on his feet again. We calculated the time it would take us to reach the point and found we could not manage it. " No matter ! " exclaimed Mussolini. " I shall come back here another day. Yes, I want to go up there, I want to live up there—an hour."

He halted a second or two before completing his sentence. How long a period should he specify—ten years ? a month ? a day ? Truth prevailed—an hour!

Writing this book, I shall tell the life-story of this untiring *Camminante* in similar fashion, by fits and starts and short cuts. Now it will be a matter of ten years, now of " an hour " !

CHAPTER IX

EARLY INFLUENCES : " OLD GIOVANNA " AND VICTOR HUGO

" Old Giovanna " and her three husbands—Her Teaching—Mussolini and the Mummy—Victor Hugo Readings in a Romagna Cow-Shed—From Cow-Shed to College.

WHOEVER delves deeply enough into the life of the people knows that it reveals strange, strongly-marked, original types of character of a kind seldom to be found in the more well-to-do classes. Dovia and its neighbourhood boasted many such human oddities, and one among them, in particular, exerted a marked influence over the mind of young Benito Mussolini.

This was a mysterious old woman known as "*la vecchia Giovanna.*"

She had been beautiful in her youth and the heroine of some passionate love-affairs. She had been married three times and according to public gossip she had got rid mysteriously of all her three husbands. The sudden end of the second of them had presented a dark riddle which had never been solved. His predecessor had been found dead one cold autumnal morning, his limbs entangled in the branches of a mulberry tree, not far from the entrance to his house. Ever afterwards not children only but grown-up people also had fought shy of the rustling leaves of this tree, especially in the dark.

Between Old Giovanna and her " third " there had been a long-drawn dogged dispute as to which should be first to die. When one of them was troubled with an unusually bad cough or twinge of rheumatism, the other would remark : " Ah, *you* will go first ! " or,

perhaps, alluding to the communal grave-digger : " Pradel will be coming for you soon ! "

Benito was in constant attendance on Old Giovanna, whose strange imperious ways had a fascination for him, not wholly devoid, perhaps ,of alarm. And she, for her part, recognizing that he was an exceptional boy, perhaps even foreseeing for him a great destiny, favoured him. She passed for a witch throughout the whole district and women came to her from all around to buy charms and love-philtres and quack medicines of various kinds. She taught Benito some of her magic lore. Even to-day Mussolini has strange things to say about the moon, the influence of its cold light upon men and affairs and the danger of letting its rays shine on your face when you are sleeping ; and he is an adept in interpreting dreams and omens and in telling fortunes by cards. He can explain too why oxen allow themselves to be led by women and why the front paws of a hare are so short, and can throw light upon many other such mysteries. " My blood tells me," " I must listen to my blood," are phrases sometimes used by this statesman-gladiator, so rational normally in coping with the urgent questions which confront him. " It is no good ! " he will add : " I am like the animals. I *feel* when things are going to happen—some instinct warns me and I am obliged to follow it."

He has learnt, perhaps from Giovanna, certainly with Giovanna as his first guide in the matter, the wisdom of hearkening to premonitions, just as a teacher of very different calibre, Professor Vilfredo Pareto, economist, sociologist and philosopher, discoursed to him during his University years on " the value of the sum total of imponderable things "—that " value " by noting which Pareto himself was able to expose the figment of the " economic man "—the man without peculiarities or predilections—whose absurdity had been demonstrated so brilliantly, also, by Ruskin before him. Even in the spheres of science and statistics, in so far as

they deal with men and human affairs, "the sum total of imponderable things" is apt to upset all the calculations of those who make no account of it.

The disciple of Pareto and Old Giovanna sets much store by "imponderable things"—in fact he leaves to them the deciding voice. Perhaps that is why he makes so few mistakes. Logic alone does not suffice, the imagination is always apt to lead astray.

One night in the quiet of his own house, whither the sounds of Rome came blended into a confused murmu like the ebbing and flowing of the tide, the Italian Premier was reading with intense rapidity, as is his habit, the dozens of newspapers which pour in on him from all parts of the world. It was in January or February, 1923, and the *Times*, like most of the great English journals, was full of the photographs of the tomb of King Tutankh-Amen, and of the mummies and regalia discovered inside it by Lord Carnarvon, who had fought in vain against the maledictions invoked by the Egyptians upon disturbance of their remains. Reading in paper after paper of the evils that had befallen the violators of the Pharaohs' tombs, Mussolini, so fearless as to ordinary perils, at last jumped up and rushed to the telephone and began to pour forth orders in his most masterful and peremptory tones of voice. A short time previously an Egyptian mummy had been brought to him as a gift and he had had it placed in the great salon "della Vittoria," beneath the famous tapestries, in the Palazzo Chigi. Now it must go!

He telephoned and telephoned and telephoned again until he felt satisfied that his orders for its immediate removal were being executed. Picture the excitement and confusion in the bureaucratic circles of Rome!—Rome the impassive from time immemorial! Imagine the flurry and hurry and scurry of all the ushers, custodians, and employés of all descriptions, never so hustled and harassed in all their lives before! Perhaps

it was the most sensational achievement of the Fascist Government down to date !

As for the remains of the worthy Egyptian of 4,000 years ago, they were at once consigned to a sarcophagus in a museum which is so small and so secluded as to be comparable with a rock-hewn tomb. There, while the living incur no risk of the guilt of sacrilege, the dead can work no harm to the sensibilities of the living. A matter for satisfaction to that highly sensitive, and very much alive mortal, Benito Mussolini.

. . . . . .

But if Giovanna was one of the lad's chief educators, Victor Hugo was another. A copy of "Les Misérables" in an Italian translation, atrociously printed and produced, with two columns of small type to the page, and with many of the pages torn and some missing, had made its way somehow to the little village of Dovia, and Jean Valjean, Cosette and the saintly Bishop were to play their part in shaping the character of this boy, who read the book aloud in the cow-shed in which, during the winter, the country folk loved to pass the time.

They sat around in the dark corners while the oil lamp which hung from the roof sent forth its flickering light and the shadows came and went upon the rafters and the floor. The oxen went on eating their hay and ruminating, jostling up against each other. The women proceeded with their spinning, sewing and knitting ; the men smoked their pipes and drank some drops of the weak wine which comes from pressing the already used grapes ; the youths, foregathering with the girls, would now and again give out some jesting words or indulge in a playful shove which is the rustic way of paying court. The more vigorous the shove, the warmer the feeling it expresses.

In this setting it was, and in the warm atmosphere generated by the breath of the cattle, that Benito read the book, reading on and on until eleven or twelve o'clock. Then the women would go, walking to their homes

over the moonlit, glistening snow, or on dark nights guiding themselves with their big lanterns of brass or iron, their hearts still quivering over the misfortunes of the good convict and the great love of Mario. The men, some of them at least, began exchanging opinions on what they had heard and kept up the debate until two o'clock or so. In winter the nights are so long and the hours of work so short. Grave, sententious talk it would be for the most part, as is the way with country-folk, wont to ruminate like their oxen, but occasionally the younger men would break out into hot and even passionate discussion. The phantasms of the poet's brain moved and excited their simple hearts. They did not understand all they had heard but they responded to the sense of life imparted by the wonderful old man to his work ; they gave way by turns to feelings of hope and sorrow ; his wealth of words, his torrents of rhetoric, carried them away. For Hugo's rhetoric rang true in a human sense, if not artistically. It was the rhetoric of one who believed in the great ideas dominating his time—in Liberty, Fraternity, Virtue ; that is why, with all its faults, it came home even to a young boy like Benito who saw in it only what was true and good and eternal.

His mother, however, grew anxious. She came to realize that this son of hers was needing other contacts, needing mental influences such as a village could not provide ; perhaps, also, that he would be better for living under a discipline less consistently rigid ; young thoroughbreds are trained by expert jockeys with light hands. At first Alessandro Mussolini would not hear of the boy's going to college ; for many reasons, one reason being that the only available colleges in such provincial districts are those conducted by the priests. The idea of clerical education was naturally repugnant to a revolutionary who had held scornfully aloof always from the *Neri*—"the Blacks," as the Clerical Party are called in Italy. He relented however, and ended by

taking Benito to the College of the Salesian Fathers at Faenza, the town famous all the world over for its majolica, or, as the French call it, *faïences*.

In that autobiographical fragment, already cited, which Mussolini wrote in prison and which he handed to one of his biographers, Signor Rossato (with characteristic inattention to such matters he has never asked for its return), we are given these reminiscences of the journey.

"During the weeks preceding my departure I was more troublesome than usual.

"I felt a vague sense of unrest within me. I had a notion that colleges and prisons were practically the same thing and I wished during those last days of my freedom to wander about the streets and over the fields and then along the ditches and through the vineyards, in which the grapes were now ripe.

"Towards the middle of October everything was ready—clothes, equipment, money.

"I don't remember being much grieved over leaving my brothers and sisters. Edvige was only three years old, Arnaldo was seven. But I was miserable at having to leave behind me a little bird which I had in a cage beneath my window.

"On the day before we started, I quarrelled with a companion and tried to hit him but instead of doing so my fist went smash against a wall and I hurt my knuckles so badly that I had to leave with my hand bandaged up. At the moment of parting I wept. My father and I now took our places in the cart, which was drawn by a donkey. We put the luggage under the seat and set forth. But before we had gone much more than a couple of hundred yards the donkey stumbled and fell.

"A bad omen !—so my father said, but the animal got up all right and we continued on our way. During the drive I did not utter a word. I sat and gazed at the countryside which was beginning to cast its leaves. I followed the flight of the swallows and the course of the

river. We passed through Forli. The town made a great impression on me. I had been there before but did not remember it. All I knew was that I had got lost in it and that after some hours of anxious searching by my people was found again sitting quietly beside a cobbler's desk; the cobbler had generously given me, a boy scarcely four years old, half a Tuscan cigar. What impressed me most on entering Faenza was the iron bridge, *il Ponte di Ferro*, which connects the city with Lamone, its suburb. It may have been about two o'clock that we reached the College of the Salesian Fathers. The door was opened. I was introduced to the 'Censor,' who looked at me and said :

"'He's a lively little fellow, I expect!'

"Then my father embraced me and kissed me. He also was much moved. When I heard the great hall-door close behind me, I broke out into sobs."

It was farewell to his games, to freedom and to his mother! But Mussolini says nothing of all this—it is characteristic of him that he does not even mention his mother in these recollections. He is restrained by that masculine reserve of his, to which sentimentality is repellent, the man of action fearing lest it might weaken him were he to yield to it. In the English phrase, Mussolini does not "wear his heart upon his sleeve."

It must have been a deep grief to him to lose sight of the trees and the sparkling rivulet of his native place—that rivulet which has always meant so much to him. In one of his rare moments of expansion, Mussolini told a friend that in all the outstanding episodes of his life, whether of joy or grief, he has had before his eyes the vision of that country stream. Beautiful it had seemed to him always of a summer morning when he took the horse to it to drink ; his father had bought the animal in the prosperous days of the inn and young Benito had learnt to ride it bareback, spurring it along with his tough little naked heels. More beautiful still at midday

when he and his playfellows larked about upon its banks hour after hour.

On the 21st of April, 1923, there was celebrated in Rome (for the first time in this new Fascist era), the festival of the founding of the City. The *cortège* defiled slowly through the arches and beneath the columns of the Coliseum, on its way to the Palatine through the Arches of Titus and Constantine and the Baths of Caracalla.

At last, in front of the magnificent Palazzo Venezia, that great monument to the glories of the Papal Power, to the naval power of Venice, and to the reconquest by Italy of her lost provinces—in front, too, of the Tomb of the Unknown Warrior—Mussolini sat on horseback gazing at the immense army in whose ranks were represented the entire youth of the nation. Wearing the black shirt with, over it, a scarf marked with the colours of Rome, he sat there proudly, the admired of all admirers, on his beautiful chestnut, leaning forward now and again to caress it with his hand.

Perhaps, as he did so, his thoughts wandered back to the distant days when he went galloping over the meadows on his father's horse. Perhaps beyond the endless lines of armed men he saw in his mind's eye that Romagna rivulet flowing beneath the trees.

CHAPTER X

MUSSOLINI AND THE CATHOLIC CHURCH

The Protection of the Weak the Basis of Chivalry—Dreams of Rome—An Anti-Clerical but not Anti-Religious—The State and the Church—The Crucifix brought back into the Schools—The Evening Prayer at Sea.

DURING his schooldays young Benito did not lose his interest in animals, like so many people of narrow natures and sympathies. He continued to cherish feelings of affection for our four-legged brethren, moved by the instinct, strongest in the strong, for protecting all that needs protection, plants, animals, children, women—above all, women. It is this instinct of the strong to protect and defend the weak that has lain at the basis of all the great orders of chivalry known to history down to the latest of them—Fascism.

While he was undergoing his imprisonment—as he felt it to be—in the College of the Salesian Fathers at Faenza, two bits of news from home brought deep grief to him.

Instigated by revengeful malice, a neighbour and political enemy of the blacksmith's had made his way one night into the stable and had hocked the horse. Alessandro Mussolini had been obliged to shoot the poor beast and it had needed all Signora Rosa's authority to prevent him from turning his gun upon the malefactor.

And the goldfinch from which it had cost the boy so much to part—his beloved goldfinch had been suffered to die from want of food! To lose the bird in this fashion, through the stupidity of the old woman servant, was enough to make him rage. For two days and two nights he ate his heart out, turning over in his mind all kinds of sanguinary schemes of retribution,

and when he returned home he would not speak to the old *contadina* who had been the cause of his misfortune.

He sought comfort in his woes in the classics of ancient Rome, in Cæsar and Tacitus and the Æneid, and in the story of the bandits' village, hidden within the folds of the hills of Latium, which had grown to be the Capital of the World issuing its edicts to all mankind—ROME !

From his earliest childhood the story of Rome, with its myths and legends, had fascinated him. The thought of Rome, indeed, is always present and living in the hearts of the people of the Romagna. Their name for the Milky Way is *la strada di Roma*, and they say that if you will only go straight ahead, guiding yourself by it, you will arrive at the Eternal City.

ROME—that was the one word the boy would write continually on the margin of his lesson-book, or carve with his penknife upon the benches.

The years passed, the holidays at home making bright patches in the colourless mosaic of Benito's daily studies. Probably that six years' sojourn at the College and the education given him by the priests were not without their effect in shaping the mind of the man. He seemed in the earliest period of an anti-religious bent, without ever sinking into the banality of atheism.

Mussolini, the grown man, is no great lover of the clericals, and he is not, and never has been, a bigot in the matter of the observances of the Church. The Sects, on the other hand, do not please, and will never please, this fanatic for the unity of the fatherland ; he hates and, for the reason we shall learn, fights the Freemasons ; the two fiercest blows—the only two deadly blows—aimed at Freemasonry during the fifty years of national unity, were to be directed by this man, on two critical occasions, very different in their nature. But if Mussolini does not favour the anti-clericals, he has no enthusiasm either for the priestly confraternities

and he attacks the political priests with a vigour from which Don Sturzo* is still suffering. The "Popular Party," founded by that clever and excitable Sicilian priest, prospered in the confusion and chaos of the period immediately following the War, but it was crushed by the *Condottiere* from the Romagna within a few months of his accession to power in 1923. Mussolini's breadth of outlook and his thoroughness were the qualities which counted for most in the victory. In politics, as in other affairs, it is the mediocrities and the small-minded by whom things are complicated and embroiled.

What Mussolini did was to isolate the clerical question from the religious question. Others had attempted to do this ; indeed, the separation had been proclaimed of all in the form of a maxim—in the form, that is of words. But Mussolini dealt in facts, like Cavour. He did not maintain the principle of a laical and non-religious State, neutral in its attitude towards the Church, impassive and insensible when confronted with religious phenomena. Far from it. He returned to the fundamental Charter of the Nation, to the Statute which proclaimed Catholicism to be the religion of the State, the only official religion of Italy, and which yet sanctioned and recognized, on a subordinate plane, the other religious forms. The bearing of this change was enormous, from both a moral and a political point of view. The entire nation began once again to be permeated by a revival of the religious spirit, while the State was enabled to take in hand again the reins of authority over the Church—reins virtually abandoned in recent times, when a laicism, instinct with atheism, had been always to the front. Basing itself on Catholicism, standing side by side with the Church, the State could now co-operate with the latter, exercising supervision over it and limiting its action, whereas mere hostility had enabled it to evade every form of control. The

* The famous Clerical leader.

Clericals had always been able to profit by the confusion between the opposition to their party and the opposition to Religion ; their prestige had been enhanced by the fact that they could pose as men persecuted and misrepresented owing to their faith. Mussolini's—so to call it—religious anti-clericalism was far more efficacious. Influenced, perhaps, to some extent—to what extent who can say ?—by his memories of the Salesian College, Mussolini had the crucifix brought back, and with it the morning prayer, into all the elementary schools of Italy, and he affirmed the need of religious instruction in all classes of primary schools. In the speech, now historic, which he delivered on his accession to power, he set the hall of the new Italian Parliament resounding with his utterance of the word " God," and with his fervid invocation of Divine assistance—that " dark and dingy hall," as he himself had styled it a moment earlier, which never before had listened to such language, and into which he now proposed to set up, just as in the schools, the sublime image of the crucifix.

It is entirely Mussolini's work if, like the nation itself, the official organs of Italy, ostentatiously anti-religious until now, seem animated to-day by a breath of religious faith.

In the Italian Navy, for example, the use of the Night Prayer, framed in language of lofty dignity, was abolished not many years ago. It had been the custom for the youngest sailor on board a ship—in presence of the officers and the entire crew, gathered together on deck—to read this prayer aloud, all listening to it with bared heads :

> " To Thee, O Mighty and Eternal God, Lord of the Heavens and the Abyss, Whom the winds and the waves obey, we men of the sea and of war, officers and soldiers of Italy, from this sacred vessel armed by our native land, lift up our hearts !
>
> " Bless and exalt our nation in its faith, O Mighty God : protect and exalt the King : give just glory and power to our Flag. Command the tempests and the floods

to serve it, impose terror of it upon the enemy ; set round it, to defend it, a framework of iron, stronger than the iron which encases this ship !

" Bless, O Lord, our distant homes and those dear to us ; bless, throughout this coming night, the sleep of the people ; bless us who are on guard for them in arms upon the sea ! O give us Thy blessing ! "

A moment of silence and emotion, and then the Captain, standing among his officers and men, cries out : *Viva il Re !*—" Long Live the King ! " The cry, repeated by all present, goes out over the waters. The same cry that went forth from the men of the *Palestro* and the *Re d'Italia* at Lissa, in 1866, and, in 1916, from those of the *Amalfi* as she went down.

In all these revivals we have one more illustration of Mussolini's imagination and intuition. For how were all the millions of his countrymen to learn to feel their kinship and unity save through consciousness of the universal and the eternal ?

. . . . . .

Catholicism in Italy is a force at once of cohesion and of expansion, not to be neglected by a man like Mussolini, aware of the importance of moral forces and wont to reckon imponderable factors among the factors which count for most.

. . . . . .

Whoever has been abroad in other lands, not as a mere tourist but, like Benito Mussolini, the stone-mason, working and living among the common people, knows and feels these things better than the Italians who have lived shut up in Italy. The further one goes, indeed, the more one realizes that the word *Italia*, like a light outshone by a more brilliant light, becomes blended in the more dazzling and more ancient word *ROMA*.

CHAPTER XI

THE WOULD-BE SCRIVENER OF PREDAPPIO

Mussolini qualifies as a Teacher—His Application for the Post of Communal Scrivener in his Native Place—A Refusal—What Alessandro Mussolini said about it—Mussolini and Crispi.

AFTER leaving the College of the Salesians, the boy entered the Teachers' Institute at Forlimpopoli, to leave it presently as a qualified teacher himself, the calling followed by his mother. This second separation from his home was a less doleful one, for he had learnt by now the need of discipline and had tasted the delight of learning.

The ex-pupil of the Salesians, absorbed in himself, consoled by the joys of studious youth, kept remote from everything and everybody and was a first-rate scholar,

Too many blockheads and idlers on the one hand, too many criminals and madmen on the other, have given force to the legend which tells against prize-winning scholars. It is not true, however, that the genius must necessarily be the "last in his class." The school is the world of the boy who will become a man, and it is, after all, a not unfaithful model of life.

When Mussolini attained to power they put up a tablet on the façade of that provincial Teachers' Institute in memory of the young scholar. Perhaps, had there been at the Institute in the years of his studies there some really observant professor with a gift for psychology, we might have had from him some such estimate of the youth as that which was set down by an instructor in the Military School of Brienne regarding a certain young islander in the service of His Most Christian Majesty Louis XVI: "An unusually industrious student, lives

apart from his companions, gives his confidence and friendship to no one, does not enter into conversation with them, seems shut up entirely in himself, is the prey of a boundless ambition."

When, in 1923, the inhabitants of Forlimpopoli sought, by means of memories of Mussolini's youth, reinforced opportunely by that tablet and a solemnly worded epigraph, to make out a strong case why their old-established and now famous Institution should not be closed in accordance with the new law, and the professors and students and communal authorities, all of them injuriously affected by its threatened closing, joined in an agitation against this harsh measure, Mussolini, while indulging in expressions of affectionate remembrance, proceeded to reply dryly and severely that the past must not be allowed to prejudice the future. Italians, he declared, must learn once and for all that the individual *Io*—the individual "I"—could not form one of an endless series of exceptions to laws which were made for everyone. Hitherto the law had been like the skin of a fat man's belly which could be pulled about this way or that: this should be so no longer.

They bowed to the decision and the Institute was closed. Very likely they applauded him all the more and loved him all the more for having resisted them. For the people are like little children. They ask, but they despise him who yields to them and spoils them.

Returned home from Forlimpopoli, with his diploma as an elementary teacher in his pocket, his love for his native place, and, even more, his love for his mother, who was now in doubtful health, impelled young Benito to apply to the Municipality of Predappio for the post of Communal Scrivener, which was then vacant. But this was refused him because he was too young—barely eighteen—and because already there was too much of the revolutionary about him and he was thought to be of a temperament at once too subversive and too uncompromising.

His father, out of the depth of his pride in this young offspring of his, then uttered a phrase which was to remain engraved upon the hearts of all his circle. It was from the lips of Arnaldo Mussolini that some of us were to hear it long afterwards.

On the evening of October 31, 1922, when our Chief left us to go to Rome, we of the editorial staff of the *Popolo d'Italia* remained in the office, some contributors and close friends with us, to chatter excitedly over that great event. Arnaldo, Benito's excellent younger brother, did not venture to occupy the editorial chair, now to be his, in spite of having in his hands the letter in which he was formally placed in charge of the paper, with full powers. The first act of the new Head of the Italian Government, indeed, before taking over his new duties, had been to confide to those faithful and safe hands the mission which he himself had now to relinquish. Arnaldo continued, and continues still, to perform his duties in a spirit of fine and touching devotion to his elder brother, only a portion of whose books and maps and other familiar objects—never the whole of them—he has removed from the table at which our Chief used to sit. The Prime Minister, on the occasions of his brief and hurried visits to Milan, can always come back to his room in the office without ever feeling even for a moment that he is a stanger there.

Well, it was on that memorable October evening in 1922 that Arnaldo found vent for his emotions by exclaiming to us : " And to think that the dear old father seemed to foresee it all ! When they refused Benito the post of Communal Scrivener all those years ago he attacked the Mayor and Councillors boldly. ' Mind my words ! ' he cried out to them : ' You will be sorry for this. The time will come when they will be telling how Predappio would not have Benito Mussolini as Scrivener, just as they tell to-day, with contempt and scorn, how the native place of Francesco Crispi would not have him as Communal Secretary ! ' "

The coupling of the two names seemed a veritable piece of inspiration and not merely by reason of the precise and accidental coincidence. It was fine to hear of the Romagna blacksmith comparing his own son, an obscure stripling, with an illustrious statesman ; but perhaps it was more remarkable still that he should have singled out the example of Crispi, who was the enemy of the Republicans and in abuse of whom at that period, round about 1900, all the Democrats and Socialists of Italy were vying with each other. If we look into the matter closely, however, we shall recognize in the Sicilian, Francesco Crispi, the only man among all our rulers since the great Cavour who can be said to resemble our present Premier in any way. The two men have in common a certain pride of character, as well as energy and boldness and resolution, and an indomitable feeling for the authority of the State and for the dignity of the name and honour of Italy. Mussolini himself, who is an admirer of Crispi, has said of him very truly : that " Whatever he was, he was by birth, nothing in him was acquired. . . . Masterful, haughty, contemptuous, uncompromising, irascible. . . . Endowed with great ability and political insight, a pure-minded patriot : such was Crispi in his twentieth year, such he was, still more bitter, not improved, in his fiftieth. He had grown even less pliable ; he had not been matured or mellowed by the years of his experience."

Alike in the criticisms and in the appreciation may be found implicit a personal confession on Mussolini's own part. In contrast with Crispi, Mussolini is seeking all the time to mellow and to mature, to improve and to progress, he is ever acquiring new qualities, ever getting himself into better shape, like a sculptor at work on a statue. " I could not write an English letter to you to-day," he remarked in November, 1922, to the beautiful Lady Curzon, when saying good-bye to her at Lausanne, after the International Conference : " But within a month I shall be able to do so and I promise you that

you shall receive one ! " It sounded like a diplomat's empty phrase, uttered politely and in jest, and Lord and Lady Curzon smilingly took it as such. But to their surprise the promise was fulfilled four weeks later. In the vortex of all the tremendous labour and responsibility which were his throughout those four memorable weeks (the weeks immediately following the Italian Revolution), Mussolini had found time and energy to refresh and increase his knowledge of English sufficiently to be able to address to Lady Curzon a written greeting in her own tongue—a few lines only, but correctly and gracefully worded !

" I shall make my own life my masterpiece "—that is one of Mussolini's favourite maxims. Perhaps I should say it is one of his favourite thoughts, for he is a hater of phrases.

The artist pure and simple aims at once higher and lower. He strives to put the best of himself into his work, into his living creation, and to do so with a perfection which neither time nor place can destroy ; and his creation is, in a way, detached from himself. But the art of statesmanship is an art applied to action, and the purpose of this statesman and man of action, in a sense more egoistic and more restricted, points at the same time to a still loftier ambition.

CHAPTER XII

MUSSOLINI AS SCHOOLMASTER

The Village School at Gualtieri—Mussolini and the Socialists of Emilia—Mussolini's Address on Garibaldi—Mussolini and the Mayor — The Schoolmastership ended — Mussolini's Own Memories of this First Phase of his Career.

PREDAPPIO had rejected him as its Communal Scrivener. A fortunate mistake! For the youth could not possibly have remained long in that petty and trivial post and it would have been an inapt beginning for his adventurous career, destined to be all action and excitement.

He resolved to turn to account his recently acquired diploma, and, at eighteen, he secured the position of elementary teacher at Gualtieri in that district of Reggio Emilia which, with its vast and fertile plain, is Italy's most beautiful garden.

He was not to remain there long. He loved the schoolchildren and they loved their boyish master with the flashing eyes, but this was no place and no occupation for him, and he knew it ; he was marking time merely, pending the action of those fates which were to whirl him presently into the main stream of his real vocation.

The chief benefit he derived from his stay in Emilia was of a political kind. Emilian Socialism was not to the taste of his proud and deep and romantic temperament. At a later date, in his public controversy with Giovanni Zibordi, one of the Socialist leaders at Reggio, and again when he came to edit first the *Avanti* and afterwards the *Popolo d'Italia*, Mussolini was to tell of the distaste he felt for the methods of the pleasure-loving Socialists in Emilia, and the materialistic and rather gross existence they led. Not that he favours sour visages and pharisaical

solemnity—there is nothing, really, he dislikes so much. Nor has he any sympathy with *soi-disant* ascetics. But he is himself, fundamentally and organically, *un uomo magro**—active, agile, hard, wiry, tough. When at Gualtieri he was very young and on all the afternoons of the days of festival there, and throughout a great part of the evenings, too, he used to take part in the dancing. He learned to play the violin also. These amusements entranced him ; but he disliked the way in which politics were mixed up with merry-making, the way in which the glasses of excellent red wine were drunk to an accompaniment of revolutionary chatter. Socialistic aims in his eyes were a thing to call forth all a man's militant feelings, not a thing to debate about lazily as a digestive after a good meal.

Garibaldi, the fighter and man of action, as well as idealist, was the hero of the young school-teacher's heart. On one occasion a bust of Garibaldi was to be unveiled in the market square of Gualtieri. The orator who was to have spoken on the occasion was being awaited in vain—there was no sign of him. The square was filled with people come thither from all the country round. The Mayor and the other local authorities were at their wits' ends and did not know where to turn. At last they thought of Mussolini. The young man, until that moment, had been dancing and drinking at the inn. Now he sauntered out into the market square with his coat still off. " Garibaldi ? A speech ? Why, yes ! I'll deliver one." And he proceeded to hold forth for an hour and a half on the Garibaldian legend, to the delight of his fascinated audience. They still talk about that speech at Gualtieri.

But the incident was too much for the Mayor, a bootmaker. A good speech, granted ! And young Mussolini was efficient and zealous at his work in the school. But all this dancing and drinking and card-

* Literally " a lean man "—a man who is " fit," that is, and with no superfluous flesh on him.

playing—all this *Briscola* and *Sette-e-mezzo !** And coming out into the market-square, on such a solemn occasion, with his coat over his shoulder ! Really, such conduct was quite impossible ! . . . And so it came about one fine day that there was an altercation between Mussolini and the Mayor. The pittance he was being paid was for his work as teacher, declared Benito hotly ; it did not buy him up body and soul. He had not bartered to sell his freedom for it. He was not going to have his innocent recreations interfered with. And he ended by telling the Mayor to go back to his boot-making !

That was an end to his teachership. It is on record that on his last day in class he set his small scholars copying out, for their lesson in penmanship, the words : *Perseverando arrivi !*—" Arrive by persevering ! "

Many of those children remember the occasion, and, grown up now, they remember another and very different occasion when their former teacher driving his own car, revisited Gualtieri as Prime Minister of Italy, on his way back to Rome after the elections of 1924, supported by his five million voters ! He had lived up to his own motto.

Well, the arriving was a thing for the future. For the moment all he could do was to go. He went, therefore leaving behind him his *mantellina*, his rough peasant's cape, in part-payment of what he owed for his board and lodging. He went in search of other skies. Out into the world again to see and to learn !

All along, the youth's future fate seemed at hand to guide him. It was well, in truth, that the destined chief of the Italian realm should see and learn something of the miseries and needs of the nation at first hand. Young Joan of Arc had to become conscious of the British heel crushing the beloved soil of France for the inextinguishable flame to be lighted in her heart.

Italy's great sorrow was, in the first place, over

* Popular games of cards.

those northernmost regions still under foreign rule, and secondly over those of her sons who were forced to emigrate to distant shores and fend for themselves, unprotected by their native land, and although called Italians, with no pride in the name.

Here from the autobiographical fragment already described is Mussolini's own brief record of this first phase of his career as a wage-earner and of its sudden ending—he makes no mention of either Garibaldi or the Mayor :

" Gualtieri is a region situated on the banks of the Po, between Guastalla, a town of some importance, and Boretto. The region lies about two-thirds of a mile from the banks of the Po and is protected from the river by powerful dykes with roads running along them. I arrived there on a misty and gloomy afternoon. Someone was at the station to meet me. On the following day I got to know the notabilities of the place, the Socialists and the municipal authorities, and I arranged to put up at a *pension* for 40 lire a month. My salary as a teacher was 56 Italian lire a month. That was nothing to rejoice over. Next morning I began my schoolwork without more ado. The school was a mile and a half away and was situated in a district of Pieve Saliceto. I had to deal with about 40 children. They were nice and well-behaved and I got to be fond of them. The lessons went on without a break, but class-time was over at one and I then returned home and could dispose of my afternoons and evenings as I liked.

" The first days were monotonous ; then my circle of acquaintances grew bigger and I made friends. There was dancing every night and I took part in it. The months sped by and the summer vacation approached. Then I planned to emigrate to Switzerland and try my fortune. I telegraphed to my mother asking for the money needed for the journey and my mother sent me 45 lire by telegraph. On July 9th in the evening I got to Chiasso. While waiting for the train which was to take

me into the middle of Switzerland I bought the *Secolo* and was not a little astonished when I found in a despatch the announcement that my father had been arrested. At Predappio and at Orte the electors belonging to the Socialist and Popular Party had smashed the voting-urns in order to prevent the victory of the Clericals ; the judicial authorities had issued several warrants of arrest and among the arrested was my father. This piece of news placed me in a dilemma. Was I to return or to go on ? I decided to continue my journey and on the afternoon of July 10th I got out at the station of Yverdon with two lire and ten centesimi in my pocket."

By good fortune I am able here, laying this manuscript aside, to turn to another record of even greater value—a unique document, not composed long after the event and from fading memories, but written down at the time and on the spur of the moment. It will tell us of Mussolini's first experiences as an alien in a foreign land.

CHAPTER XIII

A HODMAN IN SWITZERLAND

A Remarkable Mussolini Letter—The Journey to Switzerland—Work for a House-mason—Poverty and Privation—The Bridge of Lausanne and its Memories—Mussolini's First Imprisonment—What Prison was to teach—A Look ahead: the Mussolini of To-day and his "Museum of Horrors."

POOR Signora Rosa! At the moment when her big son, her first-born and favourite, asked her for those 45 lire, she was in sore trouble. She was alone at home with her younger children, and her husband was ill and in prison. He was very soon to be acquitted of all offence and set free, but in the meantime this, his second experience of imprisonment, was too much for a constitution which had suffered somewhat from the convivial kind of existence that is apt to go with innkeeping and with a hospitable disposition. During this new period of solitary confinement he had an attack of scurvy and was in great pain from his teeth—he had had to sleep with his face exposed to the moonlight, and the moon, he maintained, had a malign and corrupting influence on all a man's bones. . . . But of all this Benito knew nothing when he wrote as follows to a companion:

LAUSANNE,
3rd *September*, 1902.

DEAR FRIEND,

What I am about to write to you are memories. Sad memories of a hopeless youth which sees everything vanish—even the ideal.*

* In the rendering of Italian into English some freedom is, as a rule, necessary, but in the case of Mussolini's own writing I have adhered to the original as closely and literally as possible.—*Translator.*

You will tell no one of what the following pages may contain : only a woman knows my sorrows, and you when you shall have read. I shall curse you if you make it a matter of gossiping. My demand for secrecy should not seem to you inexplicable. I begin.

I started from Gualtieri—saying good-bye only to my lady—on the morning of the 9th July. It was a Wednesday. From Parma to Milan, and from Milan to Chiasso, the unbearable heat nearly made me die of thirst. Chiasso, the first Republican place, harboured me until 10.30 in the evening. Reading the *Secolo* I experienced the surprise of seeing the arrest of my father, implicated in electoral disorders. The arrest disturbed me, only because, if I had known of it at Gualtieri, I would not have set out for Switzerland but for the Romagna. Together with a fellow-traveller—one Tangherone of Pontremoli—I changed my Italian money and got into the train which was to reach Lucerne the next morning—twelve hours on the way. The carriage was full of Italians. Will you believe it ?

I stood at the window for almost the whole of the journey. The night was splendid. The moon soared up above the immense mountains, all white with snow, amidst a silvery smile of stars. Lake Lugano gave out magical reflections like a polished sheet of metal on which unknown and mystical lights are thrown. Mount Gothard presented itself to my eyes like a pensive and tranquil giant granting the use of his hidden passage to the serpent of steel which with dizzying swiftness was carrying me among new people.

In the carriage all were sleeping. I alone thought on. What was I thinking of during this night which made a division between the periods of my life ? I do not remember. Only in the morning, and owing, perhaps, to physical fatigue—when we were traversing German Switzerland and the November rain was greeting as coldly as the farewell of a man doomed—did I recall the green countrysides of Italy kissed by a sun of

fire. . . . Was it a first spasm of homesickness ? Perhaps. At Lucerne I changed trains and took a ticket for Yverdon, lured thither by my travelling companion who promised me a post in the service of a relative of his, a draper. I reached Yverdon at 11 on Thursday, the 10th, after 36 hours of train journey. Feeling stupid and weary I made my way into a cheap-looking inn where I had occasion for the first time to talk French. I had something to eat. We then went to see that draper. I managed to do a lot of talking, nevertheless he invited me to dine with him. I accepted. We had some more talk without any tangible results. At last he gave me a crown. So that he should not imagine he was benefiting me I left with him as a pledge a beautiful knife of Arab make which I bought at Parma on April 1st when I was there with our good and tawny-headed Romani.

On the Friday I remained for one hour in front of the statue of Pestalozzi who was born at Yverdon ; and for 23 hours in bed. On the Saturday, together with a painter out of employment, I went to Orbe—a neighbouring town—to get taken on as a manual labourer. I found work and on Monday, the 14th, I began : eleven hours' work in the day at thirty-two centesimi the hour. I made one hundred and twenty-one journeys with a hand-barrow full of stones up to the second floor of a building in process of construction. In the evening the muscles of my arms were swollen. I ate some potatoes roasted upon cinders and threw myself in all my clothes on to my bed : a pile of straw. At five on the Tuesday I woke and returned to work. I chafed with the terrible rage of the powerless. The *padrone* made me mad.* The third day he said to me : " You are too well dressed ! " . . . That phrase was meant to convey an insinuation. I should have liked to rebel and to crack the skull of this upstart who was accusing me of laziness while my limbs were giving beneath the weight of the stones—I wanted to shout

* *Idrofobo* in the original.

out in his face : " You coward, you coward ! " And then ? The man who pays you is always in the right. Saturday evening came. I said to the *padrone* I intended to leave and therefore wished to be paid. He went into his office, I remained in the lobby. Presently he came out. With ill-disguised rage he threw into my hands twenty lire and some centesimi, saying : " Here is your money and it is stolen." I remained as though made of stone. What was I to do to him ? Kill him ? What did I do to him ? Nothing. Why ? Because I was hungry and had no shoes. I had worn a pair of light boots to pieces on the building stones which had lacerated both my hands and the soles of my feet. Almost barefooted I went to an Italian's shop and bought myself a pair of shoes, hobnailed in mountaineer's style. I packed off, and on the next morning—Sunday, July 20th —I took the train at Chavornay for Lausanne.

This is not a beautiful city but it is an attractive one. From the summit of the hill it extends down to the shore of Lake Geneva, with its enchanting suburb of Ouchy. It is full of Italians (6,000) who are not looked on with much favour, and the Executive Committee of the Socialist Party has its head-quarters here, and the weekly journal *L'Avvenire del Lavoratore** which I edit in collaboration with the Advocate Barboni is issued here.

But let us proceed in good order. In Lausanne I lived carefully the first week on the money I had earned at Orbe. Then I was again hard up. On the Monday the only piece of metal I had in my pocket was a nickel medallion of Karl Marx. I had eaten a bit of bread in the morning and I did not know where to go to sleep that evening. I wandered about in desperation, and presently—cramp in the stomach preventing me from walking any longer—I sat down on the pedestal of the statue of William Tell, which stands in the Parc de Montbénon. My appearance must have been terrible

* " The Future of the Worker."

during those terrible moments, for the people who came to inspect the monument scrutinized me with suspicion, almost with alarm. Oh ! if De Dominicis had come to preach his moral lessons to me there how gladly I would have laid him out !

At five o'clock I leave Montbénon and direct my steps towards Ouchy. I go along the Quay—the very beautiful road by the shore of the lake—and soon evening comes on. In the dark the last rays of the sun and the last sounds of the old bells take me out of myself. . . . A feeling of infinite sadness assails me and I ask myself on the lake's shore whether it is worth while to live another day. . . . While I muse thus, a sweet melody, like a mother's lullaby over the cradle of her little boy, diverts the course of my thoughts and I turn back. In front of the splendid Hôtel Beau Rivage an orchestra of forty is playing. I lean up against the railings of the garden, amidst the dark green firs, and listen intently. The music comforts both my brain and my stomach. But the intervals are terrible, the cramp stabbing into my entrails like red-hot pins. Meanwhile the crowds of holiday-makers are moving about on the pathways of the Park—the rustle of silks may be heard and the murmur of languages which I do not understand. An elderly couple pass close by me. They look English. I would like to ask them to give me *de l'argent pour me coucher ce soir.** But the words die on my lips. The lady glitters with gold and precious stones. I have not a *soldo*, I have no bed, I have no bread. I make off, cursing. Ah ! that blessed idea of Anarchy of thought and action. Is it not the right of the man lying on the ground to murder him who crushes him ?

From ten until eleven I stay in the public lavatory, from eleven to twelve under an old barge. The wind blows from Savoy and is cold. I return into the town and spend the rest of the night under the *Grand Pont* (the " Great Bridge " connecting the two hills). In the

* " Some money to get myself a bed to-night."

morning I look at myself out of curiosity in the windows of a shop. I am unrecognizable. I meet a man from the Romagna. I tell him briefly of my affairs. He laughs at me. I curse him. He puts his hand in his pocket and gives me ten *soldi*.* I thank him. I hasten to the shop of a baker and buy a piece of bread. I continue walking towards the wood. I feel as though I had a fortune. Having got a long way from the centre of the city I bite into my bread with the ferocity of a Cerberus. For twenty-six hours I had not eaten.

I feel a little life flowing through my veins. My courage is returning with the flight of my hunger. I decide to make a struggle. I direct my steps towards the Villa Amina, Avenue du Léman. An Italian professor named Zini lives there. Before making my way into the entrance-way of the dainty dwelling, I polish my shoes and arrange my tie and cap. I enter. Zini has a head of untidy grey hair ; his nose is phenomenal. I have no sooner addressed him in Italian than he discharges at me a volley of : " Oh, these nuisances, these eternal nuisances ! Holy Christ ! What do you want ? Eh ? I don't know, I don't know ! I'll see. Let me see now. . . . Better go to Borgatta, *rue Solitude*. . . . I wish I could. . . . Possibly ? . . ."

" Oh, go to Hell with him who made you, you old slut ! " And with this salutation I left him.

In my next letter I shall tell you all the rest. I promised you a romance and it has been, and is, a reality.

I have received your postcard. Send me the Ode and news of our friends.

Your friend,
Mussolini Benito.

Mussolini, it will be observed, does not insist, as others might have done, on the tragic suffering he had had to bear. This youth of nineteen writes with the stoic simplicity and the natural, unassumed dignity and

* Twenty *soldi* make a *lira*.

reserve which are to be the lifelong characteristics of his style. He does not open out his whole soul to his friend but confides to him a record only of exterior facts, not of the workings of his mind. And how curiously typical of him is that semi-biblical threat, at once solemn and touching—that curse impending over the head of his friend, should he make the letter "a matter for gossiping!"

This first phase of Mussolini's Swiss experiences was made up of episodes reminiscent of Gorky. But when he talks about them he does not do so in the acrid tones habitual with the Russians in their revolt against the existing order of things. Even the most moving and dramatic incidents are not tinged with lugubrious or morbid colouring when he recounts them. I believe that, though he may ponder over them with a slight touch of bitterness, he is glad in his heart of hearts to have experienced them and mastered them; they were an ordeal through which he passed successfully, as he himself expresses it; they had their part in making him the man he is. The force and greatness of a man, if he has any force and greatness in him, go on increasing in proportion to the burdens he has to bear. Was it not Emerson who said that the reward of a duty performed lies in the acquisition of strength to perform a duty that is more difficult?

One evening Mussolini wandered out from Lausanne in the dusk. He wandered and wandered, passing at last even the suburbs. Not having a penny in his pocket, there was no prospect for him of a lodging for the night so he was glad to escape from the tantalizing glimpses into homes, and from that ostentatious display of luxury which is so terrible to a hungry man at a loss even for a bundle of straw to lay his head on. His path lay over the Swiss countryside, always so neat and spruce and well combed, with its succession of small, idyllic villas and *châlets*, looking like toys from a Noah's Ark deposited on little squares of imitation grass and among painted

trees. A keen eye may note hidden somewhere in every such *châlet* a big ink-stand and a musical box. With these accessories beside them, in a *châlet* standing well away from the dusty main road, a little family sat at supper. You should hear Mussolini himself tell the story !—he depicts the whole establishment for you in such incisive detail, reproducing histrionically every feature of the dialogue, conjuring up each speaker vividly in turn : the head of the house in his shirt-sleeves ; the long file of dutiful sons diminishing in stature like the pipes of an organ ; the lamp in the middle of the table, upon the white cloth ; the mother ladling out the soup while they all wait in pleasant anticipation. The lean, hollow-faced vagabond approaches slowly to the hedge bordering this little square of green grass and flower-beds, much as the wolf in the fable approached little Red Riding Hood and her basket, with sharpened teeth and hungry eyes.

" Have you any bread ? Give me some ! "

They gave him some but without the friendly words or even the kindly silent smile which lend sweetness to charity. The vagabond was of the race of givers, not of takers, and he was within an ace of throwing the bits back. But the stomach, as that great mendicant, Ulysses, observed, is like a snarling dog which will never keep quiet until its hunger is assuaged and which will have its fill at any cost. And so it happened that evening.

Little by little, Mussolini became accustomed to his nomadic life of want and came to know the tricks and deceits, the mishaps and miseries that go with poverty ; he came to learn that whosoever has fifteen *centesimi* in his pocket has the right (this was true, at least, twenty years ago) to remain on the territory of the Swiss Republic unmolested for twenty-four hours, after which time he passes once again under the control of the police ; but that in order to stay on undisturbed indefinitely, one needs to have at least a hundred of these *centesimi* : a franc, the magic shibboleth the possession of which

satisfies the State authorities that one is not a vagabond. The franc, emblem of liberty, is held more sacred than a holy relic. Men have been known to die of hunger rather than change their franc. . . .

Little by little, he came to feel the fascination of this kind of existence. It is an elementary kind of fascination, akin to that possessed by various forms of sport, above all by mountaineering. Mountaineering schools men into having few requirements, it liberates them from slavery to the superfluous. It is a fascination akin also to that which war—for all its horrors and miseries—exercises over strong and virile men, even the best of them.

The life taught him also to love his country with a deeper love ; and, mixing with men of other nationalities, he learnt to feel how different he was from them, how closely related to his own. He learned to listen to the mysterious voice of race and to appreciate those Italian gifts and virtues which chimed in with his own. Italian shortcomings came home to him in the same way and offended and displeased him all the more. Just as it distresses a mother to see her children behaving badly in the presence of strangers, so he would have all Italians free from everything that could evoke the contempt or condemnation of the foreigner. Yet he was conscious of a solidarity with his compatriots even in their defects, and he made more allowance for these than for the defects of others. He learnt to distinguish between defects which are tolerable, inevitable and incurable, defects which are merely the *défauts de nos qualités*, and those others which are more grave, and with which good qualities are incompatible. A certain insouciance, for instance, a certain inattention to the comfortable side of life, to hygiene, to cleanliness, to physical and moral fitness—these things may result from a mode of existence which is simple and patriarchal, and they serve to maintain this mode, preserving it from the softness which tends to make men idle. But it is not per-

missible to Italians to be lacking in civic courage or in moral uprightness or to be demoralized by greed of pelf. Unselfishness in action should be one of the redeeming qualities of the race ; and the very fact that they are frugal and simple in their habits should save them from bending the knee to Mammon.

. . . . . .

Wherever he wandered, Mussolini earned his living by work. While looking out for something better he had begun as a hodman, but, as already indicated, the wages were wretched. At nineteen, after a day of such labour, a youth's appetite is formidable, so almost all his money went on food and there was not enough left to pay for decent lodging. And Mussolini is a plebeian with aristocratic tastes and cannot put up with dirt. He is a man of extremes in everything. One day, during the war, he found in his bowl a mouse which had escaped into it from the soup-tureen. He just pulled it out by its long tail and went on quietly with his ration, making a virtue of necessity ; but he makes a grimace if in a well-appointed restaurant he is given a glass which is not spotless. In Switzerland at this period, rather than try to accommodate himself to the filthy and evil-smelling abodes which were " within his means," rather than subject himself to the degrading companionship he would have to encounter in low-class lodging-houses, he preferred to face the hardship of sleeping out of doors, in sheepfolds and any other such refuges available.

There is a bridge at Lausanne which has played an historic part in his life. Under it he sometimes found shelter, having selected a certain spot upon the dry sandy river-bank. One night there was a downpour of rain and, finding providentially the lid of a compositor's case left open in a printing-office hard by, he packed himself into it and fell fast asleep immediately. In the blissful and profound slumber of youth he forgot his miseries and fatigues and anxieties. But in the morning he was rudely awakened ! He was to experience his

first encounter with the police. He was arrested and locked up for a night and a day. Then he was released.

Here began that long series of imprisonments which was to be continued throughout so many years of venturesome wandering—in Switzerland, Germany, France, Austria and Italy : an educational primer in eleven chapters it might be called. In truth, while the loss of freedom was not so very slight a mishap to such a youth, Mussolini's periods of imprisonment were to enrich his mind, to temper and refine his whole personality. They have wrought him into the strongest steel. In prison he learned more things than one can easily catalogue, from foreign languages to Arabic numerals : but above all, patience !—a gift which enables this restless, impetuous and fiery being to control himself completely and evince no sign even of strain during long periods of trial. An illustration of this was given recently on the occasion of the funeral of Nicolo Bonservizi, the Fascist and member of the editorial staff of the *Popolo d'Italia*, who was treacherously assassinated by a Communist in a Paris restaurant in March, 1924. The funeral procession, which had brought together three or four hundred thousand persons, was held up at one point for fifty minutes in a drenching rain. Everyone else showed impatience, but not Mussolini. Refusing to shelter himself beneath an umbrella—for the solemn cortège seemed incompatible with that *bourgeois* symbol, worthy only of a Louis Philippe—standing motionless, his hands by his sides, at attention, his hard hat issuing streams of water from either side of its brim, as from pipes of a Gothic cathedral, upon his soaking and dripping cloak, he remained there, a very monument of impassiveness. It was we others all around him who did the murmuring and complaining. And when the cemetery was reached, Mussolini, unaffected by the unceasing downpour (except that his voice was hoarse) delivered, calmly and impressively, a noble oration in honour of our martyr. He then knelt with the rest of us upon the

damp ground, in accordance with the impressive Fascist rite. After which, swiftly and suddenly, he disappeared amid acclamations.

And this same gift of patience has made it possible for him, for all his feverish ardour, to wait, not hours merely, but weeks and months, and even years, without display of hurry or worry—to wait for the maturing of the event which he had foreseen and planned.

But this gift and many other such virtues were acquired at the cost of endless sufferings. I shall never forget one evening in the springtime when Mussolini, then a journalist merely and ordinary citizen, and three or four of us, his friends and editorial colleagues, were crossing the public gardens of Milan at the hour when the custodians were closing the barriers, we had found two or three of the barriers already closed. Mussolini looked like a caged wild beast, every nerve tingling, a look of ferocity in his eyes, as we hastened at break-neck speed towards the egress still open. When urged not to rush, but to take things more quietly, he replied excitedly : " No, no, I can't ! I can't bear to feel shut in ! These bars and railings—I can't stand them—they are torture to me ! I can't stand the feeling of being thus suffocated ! Oh, yes, you may laugh, you others, but you have never known what it is to have been in prison—eleven times in prison, my friends ! It is a feeling you can never get rid of ! "

At the front, during the War, all the reproofs addressed to Mussolini, whether as private soldier or afterwards as corporal, had to do with his dislike of being " shut in." Even during the intensest bombardments he could not bring himself to withdraw, as it was his duty to do, into the caves and deep natural grottoes of the mysterious Carso. The feeling of being confined and hemmed in was too much for him. On the occasion of his one visit to Capri he shocked the local boatmen by refusing to enter the Blue Grotto. " I hate Freemasonry with all its rites in darkness," he once

exclaimed. "I hate grottoes, I hate everything that does not unfold itself freely, clearly, openly, in the light of the sun!"

There is a story by Rudyard Kipling of which I often think. A native who has been convicted of theft and brought up before the powerful Ameer of Afghanistan for sentence, pleads hunger in extenuation of his misdeed. The Ameer will not listen to the plea and makes a sign with his hands. Upon this, a member of his suite stands out and tells how he, the speaker, had at one time been the porter of a cotton merchant, and how once his master had come to him with a new assistant, just taken into his service: a man with delicate fingers and a commanding look in his eyes, who yet proved the best worker the merchant ever had—he worked from morning till night without a sigh or a murmur. It was the Ameer!—a rival had ousted him from the throne and he had earned his bread thus by his own exertions. "Have you understood?" the Ameer asks. "I and mine also suffered from hunger, but I did not steal." And he makes another sign. The man's head is cut off.

The hodman of Lausanne has the right to be stern with others. He has experimented on himself and knows that he has powers of resistance; but he knows also what it costs to resist, and therefore he is often indulgent. He reserves his greatest severity for those whom he esteems: it is always a sign of his favour and affection when "he treats people badly"—so he himself says. Tolerance and indulgence are apt to be signs of his contempt. The weak and vain and foolish and careless, poor wretches, how can they stand up against trouble and temptation? But you—you who *can* show strength of character, you *must* show it! It is the imperative of Kant and of Nietzsche. You who can, because you can, *must* be inflexible! Money and the greed of money and the seduction of the pleasures which money can buy—these things are not to be reckoned in extenua-

MUSSOLINI'S DAUGHTER, EDDA

MUSSOLINI'S SON, VITTORIO

tion of the man who disgraces himself, because they are things which mean nothing to Mussolini himself. Ambition is the only trouble that gnaws at his vitals. Wealth and pleasure have counted for nothing with this implacable fighter. Nor can this be claimed for him as a virtue, so profound was his natural indifference to these things.

Returning in 1922 from Lausanne to Milan, on his way back to Rome and to his children who he knew would be giving him a demonstrative welcome, he remembered that he must bring them some little present. He searched in all his pockets and portfolios. "*Diamine!*" he exclaimed. "I have only twenty lire in all. I am as spendthrift as ever!" And he had had to borrow 100 lire from one of his secretaries.

He has a houseful, now, of things that people have given him. Much he cares about them! One entire hall in the Palazzo Chigi has been turned into what he calls his "Museum of Horrors." It would almost seem as if there were no one in the whole of Italy who had not wanted to send some token of personal gratitude to this saviour of the country. The fantastic and incredible things that pour in on him, side by side, of course, with objects of real value and beauty! An exciseman sends a painting "still oozing with pure salad oil," as he himself proudly describes it; there are very fine Egyptian cigarettes—Mussolini does not smoke; delicious chocolates—Mussolini does not eat sweets; choice fish, sometimes of extraordinary size, veritable marine monsters; every imaginable kind of game, from chamois brought down on the King's estates in Savoy to wild boar from Sardinia and the famous woodcock of Calabria. Often the gifts bring joy to the children's orphanages of Rome; sometimes they deck the table of the hospital for men blinded in the War. A toreador's cape ablaze with gold embroidery is spread out on the back of a chair, with, near it, some damascened Persian swords and a curving Turkish scimitar beautifully worked; Mussolini

treasures such gifts as these, as he does all emblems of war or of manly sport. Some unknown little manicurist has sent a presentation specimen of some new kind of "toilet soap" of her own devising; a workman in his free time has executed pen-drawings for him on egg-shells of the great buildings of Italy, among them St. Peter's and St. Mark's and the leaning tower of Pisa. There are any number of portraits. A kind of lay Carthusian has contrived, out of pieces of wood, a picture with three panels to it: Mussolini on one, General Diaz on the second, the Duke del Mare on the third: the three Condottieri of the Italy of our day! A ceramic worker of Faenza has reproduced Mussolini's features on a plate in violently contrived contrasts of black and white, inscribing on it in the old-fashion characteristic of Romagna pottery: "Either Black or White." There is one devoted Fascist who is eager that the Prime Minister shall drink no other wine but what comes from his vineyards; for fear anyone should water it or tamper with it in any way, he accompanies the consignment himself, standing sentinel, as it were, over the cases: he keeps careful count of the number of bottles and before one case can be exhausted he brings another. There are countless curiosities: a full-rigged sailing-ship, for instance, made out of straws and complete in every minute detail, laden with little golden eggs—the gift of a co-operative society of farmers; and a magnificent pair of men's shoes constructed in tricolour design, red, white and green in stripes: the Prime Minister's private secretary has been so heartless, I believe, as to divorce the pair, keeping one of them on his writing-desk as a paper-weight—and a warning! The *objets de vertu* would need a catalogue to themselves. Among these, the jewels are the things in which the recipient takes least interest. A well-known Italian marquis tells how once, when he was travelling with Mussolini, he pricked his finger with the point of a tie-pin which had been stuck in the lining of a port-

manteau—a tie-pin adorned with a superb engraved sapphire.

"But, my dear President!" he exclaimed. "You might lose it—it is a thing of some value."

"Oh, is it?" was the reply. "I never looked at it, I don't know who sent it to us. Put it away."

CHAPTER XIV

MUSSOLINI AS UNIVERSITY STUDENT AT GENEVA

The Building Season over, Mussolini becomes an Errand-boy and University Student—His Morning Rounds—A Daily Transformation—Professor Pareto—Mussolini's Russians—His Debate with Vandervelde.

BETWEEN Geneva and Lausanne, young Benito was making his way. From being a mere hodman he became by stages a full-blown mason, finally a skilled hand—all within the space of a few months. He was an expert in the handling of cement, and he made a speciality of the cornices of windows.

This is difficult work. You need good eyes and dexterity for it, because the bricks used in the cornice have to be placed in line, they must lie absolutely straight vertically and horizontally, you cannot place them just anyhow like those for the walls. The applying of the cement has to be worked at untiringly if really elegant cornices of the right thickness and roundness are to be achieved.

Another speciality of his was the fixing of the flags, in accordance with our old Italian custom, on the summit of the newly completed building. This task was a delight to him—he would yield it to nobody. Up he would clamber, as nimble as a cat, to the topmost point of the roof and look down over the edge; then came the tense and thrilling moment when he got the flag-pole into its place securely and attached the green festoon round the flag.

And now the building is complete. A house has been built. Rejoice, citizens! The young workman descends, feeling content and happy. Three cheers!

It may not be a palace, but it is a human habitation, a house to live in. What more do you want? It is a building and it is complete. There it stands, a place of refuge, a challenge to the years.

Exactly opposite Mussolini's room in the offices of the *Popolo d'Italia*, in Via Lovanio, a big new building was in process of construction. How often he would put aside some half-written article to stand gazing out at that building from his window. "Look at them!" he would say, with a wistful expression in his eyes: "Look at them in their smocks working away—how I envy them! See how they are building the house up gradually with their stone and bricks and mortar, while here am I just endlessly scribbling away on paper! Oh, how I long for that sense of satisfaction one gets from finishing one's job—finishing it once and for all! My labours of Sisyphus have no end. I have always to be beginning all over again. Look at these fellows! Two months ago there was nothing there, and now the house has already reached quite a height. They are busy now on the roof. That is what I call work!"

But not all seasons are good for house-masons. During the winter—and the Swiss winter is the longer half of the year—no building-work is practicable. And yet one must eat! In the snow-time, indeed, this is more true than ever.

During the winter months, Mussolini acted as errand-boy at an Italian wine-merchant's in the Grande Rue. The pay was small, but he had a little garret with a camp-bedstead in it—it was cold, but he had it all to himself; and he was given a plate of soup—*Minestra*—some bread and a little wine, twice daily; occasionally he would get a piece of meat. "He eats too much, that boy! Oh, *what* a lot he eats!" the merchant's wife would exclaim, and in reply he would protest that he had a dozen hours of work in his legs

and that he needed to fortify himself. By great good luck, occasionally, when stock was being taken of the wine in the cellars, the youth was allowed to have a taste of really good wine, pure Albana, a wine from his own homeland. The generous liquor flowed into his throat direct through its india-rubber tube before being poured into the cask destined for some customer. He had other strokes of luck also. For instance, there was always a tip for him when he was sent to customers with bottles of wine. Barefooted and bareheaded, wearing a clean shirt with patches in it, and a pair of breeches, he would go down the Grande Rue in the early morning amongst all the well-dressed people, pushing in front of him a little cart laden with the bottles which he had to deliver at the *pensions* for foreigners or for students or for the people of small means who live in such numbers along the shores of Lake Geneva. The proprietresses of these establishments, excellent women, economical, tidy, early-rising, would return the empty bottles, check the bill and pay, adding always the 50 *centesimi* to which *fattorini* who do their work punctually and well are considered to be entitled. "*Merci, Madame!*" he would say politely, with a bow. I can well believe (though he has never said as much) that more than one of these good dames may have been somewhat intimidated by the aspect of such an errand-boy!

In the afternoon, there would be a change of scene. Like Cinderella on the way to the ball, he would undergo a transformation. He would descend from his garret a different person altogether—shaved and brushed, wearing socks and shoes and trousers and waistcoat and coat, even a tie and a hat. He would get out of Lausanne for a long walk, or else go by train to Geneva, arriving there in a few minutes. Now he was the equal not merely of the good ladies of the *pensions*, but of their patrons, the University students who pour into Geneva from all parts of the world. These he would join in the lecture-halls of the University, to sate his thirst at the

wells of poetry and science. Of all the professors under whom he worked at this time (or, indeed, later), Vilfredo Pareto, to whom I have already referred, was the one who exercised most influence over him. The mind of the eminent economist presented, indeed, a remarkable analogy to that of the ignorant young student—this young student who had turned himself into an errand-boy and a house-mason just as other Italian emigrants learn to work and live their lives abroad under hard conditions, merely as a temporary expedient, that is, and in order to make a future for themselves.

Those studies of his in Geneva were an invaluable education to Mussolini. They taught him for one thing "the theory of the imponderable," which extends from economics into politics, and, indeed, applies to every province of life. An indelible impression was left upon his mind by Pareto's methods as a scientific investigator. Unlike other professors, Pareto, when, after exhaustive experiment and study, he had arrived at a conclusion, regarded this conclusion not as indubitable and final but merely as provisional and to be used tentatively as a basis for further enquiry.

Pareto was really a forerunner, in a different field, of two other men of science who were to revolutionize on similar lines philosophy and mathematics respectively. I refer to Bergson and Einstein. The Frenchman was to talk of the *élan vital*, the German of relativity. The Italian, before them, had used the word "imponderability"; in his different field he had been at work on similar lines, tearing to pieces the rigid and mechanical conception of an "economic man" divorced from psychology and from life. The Fascist leader has declared openly that Fascism has no armoury of theoretical doctrines and he even boasts of this, holding that every system is a mistake and every theory a prison; he says, nay he demonstrates, that it is necessary to have not a system but a method. He says of himself: "I am a wayfarer." Not without justification did he

take as his favourite pseudonym in the years 1910–1914, the words *l'homme qui cherche.*

"To seek!"—a word of power. In a sense, a nobler word than "to find." With more of intention in it, less of chance. You may "find" through a coincidence, and you may "find" something that is false; but he who seeks goes on seeking unceasingly, always hoping to attain to the truth. Vilfredo Pareto was a Master of this school. He kept moving. Without movement, Plato said, everything becomes corrupted. As Homer sang, the eternal surge of the sea is the father of mankind. Every one of Pareto's new books or of the new editions of them, includes any number of commentaries upon and modifications of his previous books, and deals in detail with the criticisms, corrections, and objections which they have elicited. He generally refutes his critics, but while doing so, he indicates other and more serious points in regard to which they might have, and ought to have, reproved or questioned him. Reflecting over his subject, he himself proceeds to deal with these points, finding some of them specious, some important, and correcting his earlier conclusions accordingly.

This persistence in research, this insatiable quest after the truth, is precisely the method which Mussolini has brought to bear upon life in general and the art of politics in particular. "I have decided not to let my name appear in the list of candidates this time," he said to me one day, on the eve of the 1919 Elections. That seemed strange to me and I ventured timidly on some remonstrances. The day after, in equally decided tones, he announced to me that of course there could be no question about it—his name must certainly head the list in Milan! Relieved but bewildered, I broke out with the words: "Why, you told me yesterday——" He straightened himself solemnly. "Signora," he replied, "yesterday was yesterday. Very well. But to-day is to-day—this very day!" Peremptory and pellucid! There was nothing for me to do but to

assent, and assent I did. Unity in essentials and pliable adaptability in doubtful cases : that is, a free hand as regards means and a firm stand as regards ends ; and *Italianità*—the Italian spirit, as you might put it—in everything ! So Augustine's maxim might be paraphrased for the purposes of Mussolini.

There was a heart which followed in sad sympathy all these wanderings, imagined although not recorded—the heart of Benito's mother. This big boy of hers, who had been so ready to beg *soldi* from her in his younger days when it was a question of paying for amusements, could not bring himself now, when he was in real need and lacking food, to ask for anything. But Signora Rosa knew intuitively more things than her son would confess. And she became ill. Benito had tidings of this and came to her and she became well again. He could no longer live in the Romagna, however, and soon we find him back in Switzerland and resuming his triple existence there. A quadruple existence it is soon to be, for the house-mason and errand-boy and University student plunges suddenly into the vortex of revolutionary internationalism.

And now I am about to destroy a legend—I, who am a real legend-lover ! I have no sympathy at all with those who go out of their way to uproot traditional ideas. It seems to me a merely stupid business to turn Lucrezia Borgia into a virtuous materfamilias, to try to prove that Christopher Columbus was an ignoramus who reached America by accident, that Galileo was a coward, in terror of the Inquisition, and that the Cid was a cunning rogue. But there are legends which have to be destroyed, and one of them is that about Mussolini having blossomed out as a finished orator as suddenly as Pallas Athene came into being, all armed with shield and spear. According to this legend, young Benito made his oratorical début at Geneva, and stood up, like David against Goliath—Goliath, in the person of the great Jaurès, falling to the ground. The facts were

otherwise. Benito's first efforts in debate were not made in Geneva at all. Even at Forlimpopoli he had delivered harangues to his schoolfellows, uttering thoughts and developing arguments by no means too orthodox. In fact, from his childhood onward political discussion had come as naturally to him as bread.

In Switzerland, of course, he set himself to acquire the use of languages. He learned a little English, a little Spanish, a little German, and French to perfection. He mixed much with the Russian students, women as well as men, all kinds of them—a strange, dissolute, eccentric, fantastic group, Nihilists and Bohemians, the last word in fervid, feverish modernity. These friends of his, all of them Revolutionaries, carried him along one day to hear a lecture by Emile Vandervelde. Vandervelde, the very moderate leader of the very moderate " Reformed Socialist " Party in Belgium, was the *bête noire* of all the Revolutionaries. His placid, doctrinaire mentality, his Flemish *petit-bourgeois* temperament, stood for only two or three ideas : Co-operative progress, with a little anti-Clericalism ; much Parliamentarianism with a sprinkling of Republicanism. Socialism, according to Vandervelde, could easily be installed any day. It was merely a matter of constructing a great many " Houses of the People," a great many *brasseries*, a great many libraries, a great many popular University Halls, to have the spending of a great many millions of Capital and to have a great many millions of Votes controlled by the Proletariat. These things seen to, a motion would be brought before Parliament and passed by a majority of one, and, behold, Socialism installed ! I do not know whether Vandervelde, who is thought of as a man of fine and alert intelligence, does really cherish such ingenuous ideas. This, at any rate, was the crude notion of his form of Socialism, at once scientific and evangelical, as it was visualized at a distance by the revolutionaries at Geneva. And this, at least, is certain—Vandervelde was not a man of turbulent spirit or of sanguine, nervous, dis-

position. (He, indeed, remains unchanged even now after the War.) In short, a Belgian reproduction of that *Socialismo della tagliatelle** which the school-teacher of Gualtieri knew so well. There was, indeed, some analogy between well-to-do industrial Belgium and Emilia with its agricultural prosperity ; and Vandervelde could be regarded as an equivalent to *Prampolini il Santone*—"Prampolini the Big Saint"—as Mussolini called him.

The subject of the lecture was Jesus Christ, as Saviour of the slavish populace and as precursor of Socialism. "Christ, the first Socialist," was one of Prampolini's *clichés*, too. Had *he* not written "The Sermon of Christmas," that famous little propagandist brochure, so evangelical in its tenor that portions of it had attained the applause of old Signor Biancheri, President of the Italian Chamber of Deputies ?

All this sort of stuff assorted ill with the severe tastes of Mussolini. Babeuf was his idol—Babeuf and all the deities of the young Russian Nihilists ; perhaps the blonde mane of some young Russian girl was not without influence in the matter. There were one or two Russian girls to the fore—one, in particular, Hélène M., of whom more presently. What a fix she was to get him into ! Nietzsche and Sorel also, were factors in his development and he had absorbed elements of Greek philosophy, that indispensable basis of human thought. In addition, there was the contribution of Spinoza and Kant and Hegel and Fichte ; Schopenhauer above all. And, by way of these, Mussolini went back to the Buddha. Perhaps only the supreme philosophies of the extreme East had succeeded in getting beyond the divine leaven of Greece ! It is easy, therefore, to imagine the mood in which this young adept in all the esoteric creeds repaired to Vandervelde's lecture ! To incite him to answer the lecturer, as did his companions of both sexes, was like asking a hare to run.

* *Tagliatelle* is a kind of home-made macaroni. The phrase might be rendered : "That milk-and-water Socialism."

Accordingly, he made a request to be heard. The audience evinced surprise and disapproval. But the lecturer, who had only just finished throwing his new lights on the figure of Christ, gave way to him. Mussolini at once began to hold forth against the Gospel, defending, nay glorifying, the spirit of Julian the Apostate. And so he got on to his favourite subject—Rome. Oh, why had the great and magnificent Roman Empire fallen a victim to the outer barbarians and to the gnawings of the feeble ideologists within ! After all, what permanent results had the Galilean left behind him ? And Mussolini launched out now into a defence and laudation of Buddhism—a recent discovery of his and due to the Russians ! What was this Palestinian Messiah, with his four discourses and his little parables, compared with the Buddha's elaborate body of doctrine in forty volumes, the outcome of the forty years of his apostolate, forty years of untiring ardour in converting, watching over, transforming, purifying, souls ?

The clever Belgian with the close-cut pointed beard allowed him to give full vent to his enthusiasm on behalf of Buddha, and the subtle lips smiled, good-humouredly sarcastic. Rising to his feet again he began, in his elegant quizzical way, by decking his victim, as it were, with roses. Then, with the ease and skill of a practised speaker, he proceeded to turn *notre cher camarade* and his new-born enthusiasm for the Buddha into merciless ridicule. "It was not fairly to be imputed to the Christ if some misfortunes due to his revolutionary preaching had cut off his career," he said.

Mussolini was extinguished. In his chagrin did he recall the words of Dante ?—

Quando si parte il giuoco della Zara
Colui che perde sen riman dolente
Ripetendo le mosse, e tristo impara
*Con l'altro se ne va tutta la gente.**

* "When one plays the game of Zara, he who loses remains grieving ; and, going over the moves again in his own mind, he discovers, sadly, that everyone walks away with the other player."

He who lost in this game of argument was to learn the moves—to learn, in particular, to give the Bible and the Gospel a wide berth in future! Mussolini has stood in a sort of terror of both ever since. That roar of laughter still reverberates sometimes in his ears.

CHAPTER XV

LARGELY RUSSIAN

Mussolini at Annemasse—A Fair Russian's Hospitality—He goes to Zurich—Trouble in a *Brasserie*—Angelica Balabanoff.

BENITO was not in great favour with the local authorities and it cannot be said that the Italian Consul loved him with any intense love. He was indeed an object of suspicion on either side of the Swiss-Italian frontier. Perhaps it was the Vandervelde incident that brought matters to a climax : in any case, he was presently expelled from the Canton of Geneva and had to say farewell to that little Russian world with all its quaintness and colour and variety—in particular to the two little yellow-maned Kursistki girls who were his fellow-students at the University. There was an end to those interminable talks and tea-drinkings and cigarette-smokings—those ardent discussions and debates in which they all sought so untiringly, in groups varying from four or five to ten or eleven, " to get to the bottom of things," following along the track of an idea like so many bloodhounds: the undying spirit of Byzance, insatiable of ideological subtleties, of nebulous, metaphysical profundities, so unlike the clear-cut logical and concrete attitude of us Latins of the West. He took refuge in Annemasse in France, only just on the other side of the frontier, as near as possible to Geneva and Lausanne. There he found occupation, part of the time giving lessons in a private school, part of the time undertaking manual labour. He would have been able to live there in peace for he got into touch with the authorities there from the start and afterwards acquired a powerful protector.

He owed this to Old Giovanna. Had she not taught him, among other valuable accomplishments, how to tell fortunes from cards? Partly out of amiability, partly for fun, he had turned to good account the pack of cards which he always carried with him, telling the fortunes first of his landlady, then of other people, winning much goodwill. Thus his fame spread afar. Indeed, when he gazed into your face with those big dark eyes of his, it was easy to think of him as a wizard.

Presently the wife of the Sous-Préfet of Saint Julien, who lived not far off, heard of him from a friend of hers to whose small boys he was giving lessons in arithmetic and geometry, and she sent word that she would like him to call on her. He now achieved a great success! *Madame la Sous-Préfète*, he declared, would shortly receive a letter—an urgent call to the bedside of someone dear to her; but there was no cause for alarm, as the person would recover. *Madame la Sous-Préfète*, as it happened, did receive almost at once a letter calling her to the bedside of her mother, believed to be dying. She went, buoyed up by Mussolini's reassuring prophecy, which was borne out. And the young Italian soothsayer was henceforth able to count on her good offices.

But a demon of mischief was to spur him into an adventure which was to lead to trouble. One afternoon, towards dusk, Mussolini made his way back into Geneva and knocked at the door of the fair Hélène M., already mentioned, the divorced wife of a Russian, now pursuing her studies at the University. She and a girl friend living with her were holding festival this particular evening. "Benitouchka," as these chattering little Moscovite sparrows called him affectionately, was a welcome guest. The *menu* of the repast which was prepared was characteristically Russian, very characteristic also of bachelor-women, always able to dispense with the necessaries of life if only they may have the superfluities—a queer make-shift meal of bread and

biscuits, ham and tea. They insisted that Benitouchka must stay the whole evening, but he declared that he must take the last train back, at eight o'clock.

No, no, he must not dream of it, his hostesses exclaimed. They would put up for the night with another woman friend and he should sleep in their bedroom. They would hear of no refusal.

And so they left their guest with the prospect before him of an unwontedly luxurious sleep in one of the two little white beds, fragrant with youth—his enjoyment enhanced by the consciousness that he was plucking forbidden fruit in defiance of the Law. He had tramped in the whole way over the mountains—between fifteen and twenty miles. The train journey was expensive and there was a risk always of his being recognized. He was tired and slept heavily. But, waking in the middle of the night, he heard the landlady of the house, in the next room, separated from him only by a thin partition, exclaim to her husband : " There's someone there ! The Russians are out, so it must be a burglar ! "

" Nonsense," replied her husband, very drowsy and disinclined for action. " You must be mistaken. Go to sleep again."

And the interloper realized to his dismay that the harum-scarum young Russian women had not thought of giving notice that they had lent him their room ! It would never do for him to make this announcement now, it was too late. Nobody would believe him. His explanations would lead to enquiries which would have awkward consequences. Well, he was in a fix but the only thing for the moment was to keep quiet !

But it was a small bed and he was a heavy sleeper and the partition was very thin. Once again the woman woke up her husband : " I tell you there is someone there—I'm certain of it ! "

The *padrone*, grumbling, rose from his bed. " All right, then," he exclaimed. " I'll get my gun and go and see." A cold sweat came over Benito ! As it hap-

pened, however, the gun was away being cleaned. There was a moment of relief, followed by suspense.

But the next words uttered were more alarming still : " Well, I'll go round the corner to the *Commissariato* " —the police station !

A pleasant prospect ! What was to be done ? How could it ever be explained that the Russian ladies had given refuge to an outlaw, a fugitive, and that he had slept in their bed ? What a sensation and scandal there would be ! The police would be able to expel them both from the country as accomplices ! . . . Perhaps it would be better to act the part of a burglar—perhaps, indeed, this was his duty as a gentleman ?

The *padrone*, who had dressed himself, cursing, and gone out, was now to be heard returning. But alone ! " There was no one at the *Commissariato*," he now told his wife. " It was shut up for the night. There was nobody there. Go to sleep again ! "

Mussolini remained still, scarcely venturing to breathe. At last morning came with all its sounds and its heart-giving light. And presently he heard the merry laughing, chattering voices : " Benitouchka, Benitouchka, did you sleep well ? " Had he slept well ! No, indeed, he had *not* slept well !—he had had a night of horrors—why, they had never explained matters to the *padrone* !

At this, there was a renewal of merriment. " Oh, but how exciting ! What an adventure ! It would have been more exciting still if there had been an arrest ! '

Thanks, but what had happened was quite enough for Benitouchka !

I really believe that if the Italian Prime Minister of to-day succeeded, by dint of infinite patience and as the outcome of endless discussions, in concluding a Treaty with the Soviet Republics, this was due to the experience he acquired in Switzerland of the Russian mentality and of the Russian way of doing things. Someone has said that you can only get to understand

a foreign race by falling in love with a woman of that race. Goethe also, was of this opinion, and sought the soul of Rome upon Roman lips.

At Zurich, whither he now went to continue his studies at the Polytechnic there—Geneva being closed to him—he moved in a different atmosphere. There were still plenty of Russians, of course, both women and men, with their orgies of strong talk and weak tea, but now there was a scientific basis for things. Something of German method and system was prominent there and the impressionable, malleable Russians came under this new influence.

Here there was much talk about Karl Marx, more than about Herzen ; and more talk about Bebel and Liebknecht than about Bakounin or Proudhon. Ferdinand Lassalle, however, whose adventurous and chivalrous life had won the sympathy of the ardent young Italian, was dismissed with a shrug of the shoulders on account of just that romantic aspect of his character—his love affair and the tragic duel which it involved being voted futile and pointless by the Science of Socialism. . . . It is no easy task to reconstitute this Zurich phase, but it is the actual truth that we are dealing here with a period during which a materialistic positivism prevailed and everything that was merely and simply human was held in disfavour and contempt as being anti-scientific. As though man himself were not the measure of the universe !

A bee, endlessly sucking in pollen of every description in order to distil honey therefrom, knows how to extract what it needs even from the most insipid flowers. And in the same way that mysterious laboratory of chemical reagents which we have within us contrives to produce antidotes to poisonous flowers. So it was with Mussolini.

There were two things to be noted at Zurich which Mussolini was to treasure : organization, that Teutonic idol, and discipline, that Germanic force.

Long ages past, in the 16th century, our great poet Tasso wrote :

" Gentil razza latina
Cui nulla manca, o sol la disciplina."

Discipline was still the thing most lacking in our national existence. The atmosphere of German Switzerland and that of Germany, whither Mussolini went later, inoculated him with this conviction : a state of things fraught with good for the future of Italy. But like all effective inoculations the immediate effects were, perhaps, violent.

One evening the pallid youth repaired as was his wont to a great communal *brasserie* in Zurich, for supper. He ordered himself a small bock, a portion of bread, and a plate of meat solicitously chosen from the bill of fare—with the solicitude that is, of a rigid economist, not of a gourmet : the cost had to be not more than 1 lira 80 centesimi, leaving a margin for the waitress, as he did not possess more than two lire in the world. Having given his order, he proceeded to talk with his revolutionary friends and compatriots, and when his food came he devoured it hungrily and hurriedly in his usual way.

But there was a *contretemps*. The waitress had made a mistake. Two lines below the dish which he had indicated on the bill of fare there was a more expensive one—she had brought him this and it cost a lira more. What a tragedy ! The bill was beyond his means. " You have made a mistake, Fräulein ! " he said to the waitress gently. " No, it is you who have made the mistake," she replied. Explanations and protests ensued. " Well, but I have only two lire on me. I shall bring the remaining eighty centesimi to-morrow."

The young Swiss waitress shakes her blonde head and exclaims in resolute tones : " Nein, nein, nein ! " " But if I haven't got the money ! " The head waitress and the cashier are appealed to. The young Romagnolo

feels the blood rising to his face. The altercation becomes ever more excited and he feels that he is being treated as a common cheat. Someone puts a hand on his shoulder. With an angry Italian curse, he shakes himself free and, his eyes aflame, shouts out to his friends : " Emilio, Giovanni, Pietro, stand by me ! They are treating me as a thief ! Let's teach them how to behave ! "

The Italians who are present rush to his support ! In an instant the whole place is in chaos—sticks, tables, beer-glasses, peaceful Swiss customers, wine-bottles and sausages are sent flying in every direction ! The stubbornness of the good Swiss, determined to get their eighty centesimi, and at once, has called forth this vehement Italian answer !

There is no further talk about the eighty *centesimi.* I think the damaged tables and smashed crockery and glass will have cost a trifle more than that !

It was at Zurich, about this time, that Mussolini came into very cordial relationship with another young Russian woman, Angelica Balabanoff.

Small, mis-shaped, hunch-backed, " Comrade " Balabanoff was extraordinarily intelligent—a strange hysterical creature with a flashing mind. She was a monomaniacal idolatress of Karl Marx ; she did not attempt to reason things out for herself, but merely swore by the utterances of the Master. She swore to good effect, however, with impetuosity and passion, and in many tongues, and her perorations were marked by that infectious heat which goes with the great blind faiths and which is caught like scarlatina. I can picture her taking her place in mediæval processions or kneeling in front of the grotto at Lourdes in that state of ecstasy which calls forth the miracle.

I saw this woman, this freak of the wonderful Slav nature, at a banquet in honour of the deputy Morgari, who had prevented the Tsar and Tsarina from paying

their contemplated official visit to Rome by threatening that they would be hissed by the Socialists of Italy for the bloody repression of the Russian mob during that "red Easter" of 1905. I saw her delivering a speech in such a fashion that she became transformed. She spoke in good Italian and with fiery vehemence; her great luminous, melting eyes shone forth brilliantly—they seemed to light up the whole of her grey-hued miserable face. Her cracked voice took on strange hoarse and guttural intonations that seized hold of you with that hypnotic spell which belongs to the hysterical and to saints. When she had finished her invocation to "Our Holy Mother"—to Russia, Russia suffering and smitten in the person of her sons—she fell back suddenly on her seat, weeping, and as pallid as death, and the rest of us, sitting round the small table, close by her, went pale to the lips also, and wept in sympathy.

In Italy, as a rule, women, even revolutionary women, have qualms about their love affairs, or at least are cautious: even when they are most sensually inclined they make some show of modesty and reserve, but this Russian in this respect was ostentatiously shameless. Ugly as she was, she boasted that she never lacked "partners"* on her propagandist expeditions all over Italy.

Although extremely learned, with a formidable range in the field of philosophy, sociology and economics, Angelica was completely lacking in culture, if by culture we mean the assimilation of knowledge through selection, reasoning, criticism and reflection. Beware of the man of one idea—still more of the woman of one idea! Were she in the country and come to a spot where the road branched in two directions, she was capable of answering the question "Which road shall we take?" with the words: "to the Left, always to the Left!" If an exquisite landscape reached its climax in the summit of a hill, and one looked down thence upon a lovely lake,

* Signora Sarfatti uses the English word "partners" thus, in inverted commas.

she would ask you suddenly whether the administration of the Commune was in the hands of the priests. The saving grace of humour failed her completely. She lacked a sense of beauty even more. This was fortunate for her ! Otherwise she would probably have thrown herself down the nearest well. As things were, she had the slightest possible acquaintance with water.

This was the woman who, with her perfervid mystic's temperament and with the deficiencies, the lack of balance, the excesses, that go with it, imposed herself on young Benito Mussolini. While keeping always within the limits of a respectful comradeship, she remained for years in close touch with him and in 1913, when he assumed control of the *Avanti*, she became his assistant-editor.

What clashes of temperament there were between them ! and what fierce feuds ! He was never revolutionary enough for her. Every now and again, over the tone of some comment of his or hers, they would fall out violently. Then for days and weeks together they would not speak. They would communicate with each other by means of memoranda, often sharply spiced. " Your remarks yesterday on the Elections," she would write, " were not vigorous enough. You ought to have emphasized the victory of the Extremists at the Congress." And he would reply : " You understand nothing whatever about it. Get on with your own work ! "

At last he sent her away.

Angelica now became an important personage in Italian Socialism, and she never tired of denouncing " the hired assassin of the bourgeoisie." Expelled presently for anti-militarist propaganda by the all too patient Italian Government of that period, she formed, together with Lenin and Trotzky, one of the group of exiled Russian Revolutionaries who traversed Germany on the special train so thoughtfully provided by the Kaiser so that they might go and prove a thorn in the flesh of the still more patient Kerensky. They over-

threw him and Angelica once again became a great personage ; in splendid official automobiles her deformed little body might be seen reclining upon cushions which had belonged to the Tsarina. But those days are past, and one fine morning in the Spring of 1924, when Easter and the thaw were imminent, she also was found to be too much of a Girondist—we are all too Girondist for somebody—and she was expelled from Russia as a "dangerous anti-Revolutionary." Poor Angelica ! some days before she re-crossed the frontier, the Ambassador of the King of Italy, accredited to the Soviet Republic, and nominated by Benito Mussolini, had entered Russia. If this blow did not kill her, she must still be foaming at the mouth with rage !

. . . . . .

Imagine a pythoness ensconced in Angelica Balabanoff's little Zurich garret, sitting beside the samovar between the bed and the big trunk—what strange prophecies might she not have uttered ?

"O woman, seated to-day upon that rickety chair one day thou shalt be more than a Princess. Thou shalt sit in the golden Kremlin upon thrones of velvet and damask, and persons of high station shall tremble before thee. That young Tartar professor in the spectacles with whom thou hast been in converse here, thy brother-in-arms and compatriot, shall be more than Emperor. Kings and Princes shall bow down before him, imploring his mercy in vain ! While this pallid youth by your side, now busy with you translating into Italian for a poor pittance the treatises of Engels and Marx—this youth, who in the very fibre of his being is antagonistic to thee —he shall be acclaimed by his own people as their Condottiere, their Chief, their Liberator."

And yet there are people who complain that modern life is lacking in colour, in picturesqueness, and in the unexpected !

CHAPTER XVI

AN ILL-OMENED EASTER

Mussolini fights a Duel and is Expelled again—Not from a Canton merely this time but from the whole of Switzerland—In Gaol at Lucerne—His Fellow-prisoner, the Assassin—The Train Journey to Italy—A Welcome at Bellinzona.

EXPELLED presently from Zurich, the young student made several short stays in Germany, earning his livelihood chiefly as a stone-mason but pursuing his studies and exerting himself all the time as a propagandist and organizer of Socialism. The difficulty of finding employment as a stone-mason increased, the better known he became through these other avocations of his. And so many regions were now barred to him ! In Switzerland his zone of operations was becoming more and more restricted, bit by bit. He was like a leaf blown before the wind, driven now hither, now thither, impelled alternatively by his studies or by his Socialism or by sentimental motives or merely by the need to earn money. About 1904 he was in one of the few Swiss Cantons from which he was not yet shut out.

It was springtime and he was twenty, and the rigid, cut-and-dried, Puritanical atmosphere of Switzerland was exciting in him the spirit of revolt. When one is older and turning things over in one's mind, one comes to realize that order and discipline are magnificent things—an essential condition of civic life ; and one appreciates the need of respect for the laws. But if the citizen ought to respect the laws the laws ought also to respect the citizen ; this state of affairs reaches its perfection in England and makes England the pleasantest country to live in—if only it were not always raining

there ! In the Latin lands there is a tendency towards the anarchy of individual freedom ; in the Teutonic, the State is everything, individuals nothing. For us Italians this kind of bureaucracy is a horrible thing, and when we see that word *Verboten* stuck up in every direction we are tempted instantly to transgress, just out of anger and indignation. So it was with our young friend from the Romagna. While in Berne, that stronghold of the *Verboten*, he lived in a *brolanda* kept by a *baccana :* these are not really Italian words but coinages of our Italian emigrants—they mean a lodging-house of the humblest kind kept by an attractive young woman. One day he got talking about work with a companion, a Reformist-Socialist, but of a lukewarm kind, and the discussion became vehement. Was it owing to political feeling or was it lovers' jealousy ? Was it the outcome of theoretical conflict or of mere male rivalry ? In any case, the two abandoned suddenly the house which they were helping to build and made their way into a remote and empty district, whence presently came the sound of two pistol-shots. Neither hit, but Mussolini was arrested and found guilty of a political misdemeanour and was condemned to expulsion, not this time from a Canton, but, in view of the gravity of his offence, from the whole of Switzerland.

And so farewell to that fascinating *baccana !*

It was Easter-time. On Holy Saturday morning he reached Lucerne on his enforced journey home to Italy.

But it is not to be expected that prison warders should set out on journeys on Easter Sunday away from their families, and, therefore, there is no journeying for prisoners, either. So Mussolini remained in prison.

In the same cell there was an old German beggar, all rags and vermin, listless and indifferent, with the indifference of extreme misery, when fear and hope are both dead. He sat there scratching himself, waiting to be sent back to Germany, having no money and no passport, a tragic human wreck, with no inclination to

speak with anyone. Late in the evening, another prisoner was brought in, an Italian. He was pallid and exhausted-looking, and his teeth were chattering. He threw himself down on the bench. Then he addressed Mussolini :

" Italian ? "

" Yes."

" What part ? "

" A Romagnolo."

" A Romagnolo—good. You can be trusted. You won't betray me. I'm hurt. Keep it to yourself."

" What is the matter ? You haven't been arrested merely for having no passport ? "

" Yes, that's all they are sending me back for. But they don't know—but they may have their suspicions. A week ago I was in a row, not started by myself, and met with a mishap. There were two fellows playing about with knives. I interposed and was badly wounded. I had to defend myself. I killed the man."

Then, suddenly, pointing to the German beggar, he asked : " This fellow here—is he watching us ? "

" No, he isn't taking any notice of us. Go on."

" Look ! " And he bared his thigh and revealed a big wound like a great gaping mouth. The blood was flowing down wetting the entire leg.

" But this is terrible. You must be nearly fainting. Are you suffering much ? "

" Like Hell ! But faint or not, it's better to suffer than to hang. They hang you in the Canton in which this happened to me. I want to get back home. The gallows ! " He had a spasm of pain. " Help me ! " he cried.

There was, of course, nothing at hand in the way of linen or cotton or lint, no scissors, not even a knife; but Mussolini, exerting all the strength he had in his fingers, managed to pull a nail out of a wooden plank and, having sharpened it a little, he cut two long strips out of his own shirt and the injured man's wherewith to bind

up the wound ; and the bleeding was thus checked a little.

Next morning the bells rang out from all the churches in honour of Christ's Resurrection. Easter and Christmas—what sweet and intimate joys, what delightful family gatherings, are associated with the names! And in addition, Easter stands for our redemption from the long imprisonment of winter, especially in the countries of the North. Everything opens out, everything expands, in the liberating light of the sun. This was an ill-omened Easter, however, for the youth in the fetid gaol, far from home, a social pariah, side by side with these two fellow-prisoners of his, the beggar and the assassin. All day long the latter lay upon the bench in a high fever and raving. " Something to drink ! Something to drink ! " he would keep calling out at times. When someone was to be heard walking along the corridor he raised himself a little, taking away his hand from the dreadful wound, so as not to attract notice to the condition of his leg.

Towards the evening, when a bowl of soup was given them, another prisoner was brought in—he spoke Italian. He looked about him observantly, but kept silent.

Mussolini drew near to the wounded man. " Be on your guard ! " he whispered. " This fellow is not a genuine Italian and there's no reason for his being sent to Italy like us. Hs is from the Ticino. They have put him here because he is a *piantina della giusta.* Mind out ! "

For in addition to his other linguistic acquirements, Benito had picked up many bits of the slang and jargon in use among anarchists and revolutionaries and other frequenters of the gaols, and with these words the common enemy, the police spy, is designated. A *piantina della negra* is their term for a *gendarme.*

The wounded man listened, alarmed, with his eyes turned down. To have been able to bear his pain as he had done he must have been endowed with an incredible

degree of stoicism. Perhaps he was endowed also with the extraordinary physical insensibility of the great criminals, degenerates or criminal lunatics, which goes with their moral insensibility. In any case, Mussolini, sensitive and all nerves, seemed to suffer more than he. Mussolini now began to address the new-comer.

" What's this about your being an Italian and being repatriated ? What's all this nonsense ? You are from Airole. I know you ! "

The man's colour came and went, and he looked confused. Mussolini, growing bolder, continued :

" There's no good your denying it. I know you. I have worked with you. You were a *scalpellino* at Giubrasco. Don't you remember ? " And eyeing him with infinite scorn, he proceeded : " And so now you are playing the spy, are you ? Bravo ! I congratulate you on your fine career ! "

And next morning he asked for and obtained leave to speak to the Governor of the prison and protested formally against the introduction of the spy and against being detained in prison. He and the other genuine Italian and the old German beggar were being repatriated merely—they could not legally be treated as prisoners. So he urged, and he carried both the points. The spy was removed elsewhere, the old beggar was despatched home to Germany, and Mussolini and his compatriot were assured that they would be taken off the following day, Tuesday.

But in the meantime those improvised bandages upon the unfortunate Italian's leg had become soaked through and through with blood. He could scarcely stand. His whole body now was covered over with congealed blood and the wound was still bleeding, bleeding, penetrating down even into his boots.

At the station and in the train the spy from the Ticino was again to be seen, as though dogging their steps, so the wounded man had to be on his guard. What a journey that was to be ! They were in a goods

train, and it took two whole days and nights to cover the few miles from Lucerne to Como. There were innumerable and interminable stoppages at every station, and at almost every signal-box. There were nine men packed together, all standing, no possibility of sitting down, even on the floor. They were kept on their feet all the time. They were given two bowls of soup and a piece of bread each day, and their hunger and thirst were terrible. The floor began immediately to be caked with the blood of the dying man—he no longer hoped to live. "I shall die when I get to Italy," he said to Mussolini. "Will you be free when you get there?" Mussolini said he would be. "That would not have been so with me. I would have had three years' prison to do first. I wouldn't have minded that much—better prison than the "long neck!" But it's all over with me now. When you get to Italy write to my mother for me. Promise me you will! Swear it! If you can, go and find her out. If not, write to her, poor old dear!"

On and on went the train on the weird journey, the sublime scenery of the Mount Gothard unrolling itself before their eyes as they looked out from their narrow leaden window with its iron bars. And on and on went the tale of the assassin's adventures—an endless tale of crimes and punishments, recited monotonously like the decades of a rosary.

He, Andrea C., of Turin, had made his way with a sister of his to Switzerland after having undergone imprisonment in Italy for some misdemeanour. Probably the sister had come in useful for blackmailing purposes and in other such ways. Two business men had insulted and threatened his sister. She and he together had killed them. His sister had contrived to escape to France; he himself had fallen into the hands of the police a long distance from the scene of the affray, and there had been no evidence at all against him—no clues whatever to connect him with what had

happened. . . . "I shall die at Como," he ended by saying again : "Write to my mother for me."

His face became more and more livid. He was dying already.

At Como the two were parted. There being no charge against Mussolini, he was just placed in a cell until the train had been cleared. Soon he heard sounds of people rushing noisily to the cell adjoining his.

Later, a Commissioner of Police came to give him back his freedom and conduct him to the train.

"And my travelling companion, Andrea C. ?" Mussolini asked.

"You wish to see him ? You really wish to see him ?"

"Yes."

The Commissioner opened a door of a room at the bottom of the corridor—it was a mortuary chamber. The dead man lay stretched out there on a bench. The blood was still trickling from his wound.

By good fortune Mussolini, the Revolutionary, was not unknown at Como. Some faithful Socialist comrades of his attended to him. After his painful experience, it was a comfort to be taken to the house of a well-to-do Socialist, Professor Giuseppe Rensi, who was then teaching at the Como High School, and who is now Professor of Philosophy at Genoa, where, for years past, he has been expounding Socialism and Fascism.

There was a simple but friendly supper party that evening. To the Professor, a cultured Venetian, endowed with an original mind, it seemed almost too good to be true to meet someone with whom he could talk in his own language—the language of ideas ; Como is a small town, and there is no excess of intellect among its inhabitants. As for Mussolini, the change in companionship for him was great indeed ; to this Past-Master in the Humanities from a murderer !

Presently his host showed him to the room which

was to be at his disposal until his departure on the following day, when he would have to resume his journey at an early hour : a nice, tidy room, with a comfortable bed and beautifully clean sheets. After the prison hammock and the horrors of the goods train it was Paradise.

Mussolini looked at the bed and then at his own self in the looking-glass. He had done his utmost to cleanse himself from the filth of the prison and the train, but he had not entirely succeeded—that was impossible. The bed was so charmingly clean, the hospitality shown him so whole-hearted. He must not abuse it. With a sigh he sat down in a wicker arm-chair to spend the night.

CHAPTER XVII

MUSSOLINI AND MACHIAVELLI

Benito at Home again—A Romance and a Song—*Bimba, non mi guardare !*—Father and Son—A Presentation Sword—The Teaching of Machiavelli.

BENITO was now called up for military training in a Bersaglieri Regiment but it was easy for him to get leave of absence from his superior officers who were amiably disposed towards him. Accordingly, he returned home for a while to lend his father a hand, although he was conscious that this was " not his job."

A bit of a romance ensued. There was a fascinating young person in the vicinity—the belle of the whole district ; she could speak French and she wore gloves when she went out to parties. She set her cap at Benito, but he countered her advances with a song : *Bimba, non mi guardare* —" Child, keep your eyes off me ! " He was a devil of a fellow, he warned her, and she would do well to leave him alone. . . . Had there been a Tosti available to set the verses to music, they might have drawn sighs from the maidens of three continents !

It was a singular life they led, father and son, at this period, with its contrast between their occupations during the day and at night : the day with its ordinary country-inn business, with its continual coming and going of customers ; the evening, with its locked doors and bolted windows, father and son sitting by the kitchen fire-place, with the lighted lamp upon the table, the while first one, then the other, read aloud from a book.

What book ? No other than the famous masterpiece of Messer Niccolo Machiavelli. Or, occasionally, for a change, the poems of Carducci, with their ardent,

revolutionary patriotism, their fierce rebellion against the degradation of the Italy of his day : a fine stimulus and inspiration to the young heart and brain !

Between the two men stood a steaming copper vessel wherein the elder had prepared a cunning brew of spiced wine in the aroma of which the scents of the Italian countryside mingled pleasantly with the rich odours of the Orient.

Not infrequently the two would drop off into slumber as they sat there, instead of climbing up the steep staircase to their cold rooms and prosaic beds ; and when they woke at dawn the room would be still fragrant, and, as it were, still resonant with the utterances of the great Italian dead.

. . . . . .

In *Gerarchia*, the review which he founded many years later, Mussolini, when already Prime Minister of Italy, was to tell us about his study of Machiavelli. He set himself the task in 1924, taking Machiavelli's " Prince " as the subject for his thesis when the University of Bologna wished to confer on him the title of Doctor *pro honoris causâ*. He was resolved to earn this distinction and refused to accept it as a gift. In this issue of *Gerarchia* for May, 1924, he tells us that it was a presentation made to him by the Black Legions (the Black Shirts of the Volunteer Militia) of Imola that had turned his thoughts in this direction. Upon the sword which they had presented to him they had had engraved the words : *Cum le parole non si mantengono li Stati.** Before Machiavelli had adopted the axiom, it had been uttered by Madonna da Imola, Caterina, the first of the Sforza family after the Grand Duke, her father, in whom lived again the virile adventurous genius of the great chieftain who by force of his great qualities rose from the calling of cowherd to that of Duke of Milan.

But if it was the presentation of this sword that

* " Not by words are States maintained."

decided the choice of Mussolini's theme, his familiarity with, and cult for, Machiavelli, as thinker and statesman, went back to those long-ago days of early youth when he made acquaintance also with the works of some great foreigners : an acquaintance which was to be kept up throughout the course of a strenuous life and which his various terms of imprisonment were to give him leisure to develop into intimacy.

Stirner and Nietzsche, Sorel and Schopenhauer, and, further back, the great Eleatic philosophers were his masters. He had a real predilection for these great sane pessimists—men who tore aside the veil of Maya, and passing beyond the realms of rose-coloured lights, attained to that of the veritable truth, accepted with equanimity, and who, while viewing things with the clear eyes of Orientals, were ready nevertheless to be stirring and doing like the Westerns they were. The works of these men, who taught that one must act, however bitter might be action, formed the pith of his spiritual nourishment. To Machiavelli, Nietzsche, Sorel, above all—these three for whose motto might stand the words *Quand même!*—he gave himself with the kind of abandonment with which others give themselves over to the comforting conceptions of blind optimism.

It was in these words that Mussolini expressed himself in May, 1924, on Machiavelli, after a ripe experience of affairs and men :

" It happened one day that I had tidings from Imola—from the Black Legions of Imola—of the gift of a sword engraved with Machiavelli's motto : *Cum le parole non si mantengono li Stati.* That banished all doubts from my mind and at once determined my choice of the theme to submit to you to-day. I might call it The Commentary of the Year 1924 on ' The Prince ' of Machiavelli—the book which I would fain style ' The Statesman's Vade-mecum'. In addition, from motives of intellectual honesty, I must add that this effort of mine has but a scanty bibliography, as you

will perceive from what follows. I have re-read attentively 'The Prince' and the rest of the works of the great *Segretario* but I have had neither the time nor the wish to read all that has been written about Machiavelli in Italy and in the rest of the world. I have wished to place the fewest possible intermediaries, old or new, Italian or foreign, between Machiavelli and myself, so as not to spoil the direct contact between his doctrine and my life as I have lived it, between his observations and mine of men and things, between his method of government and mine. What I have the honour of reading to you, therefore, is no frigid scholastic dissertation, full of citations from others; it is rather in the nature of a dramatic piece if, as I believe, we may regard as dramatic the attempt to throw a spiritual bridge across the abyss of the generations and of the world's events.

" I shall have nothing new to say.

" It may be asked what there is still living in ' The Prince ' after these four centuries ; whether the counsels given by Machiavelli could conceivably be of any use to the rulers of modern States ; whether the value of the political system of ' The Prince ' was restricted to the period in which the book was written and, therefore, limited in its application and, in part, outworn ; or whether, on the contrary, it be universal and applicable to-day—above all, whether it be applicable to-day. My thesis embodies a reply to these questions. I affirm that the doctrine of Machiavelli is more living to-day than it was four centuries ago, because, if the external aspects of our life are greatly changed, no profound modifications are perceptible in the merits of individuals or of races.

" If politics consist in the art of governing men, that is of directing, utilizing and training their passions, in their egoisms, in their interests, in view of the objects of a general order which almost always transcend the individual life because they project themselves into the future—if politics consist in this, there is no doubt

that the basic element in this art is man. There we have our starting point. What are men in the political system of Machiavelli ? What does Machiavelli think of men ? Is he an optimist or a pessimist ? And when we talk of men, ought we to interpret the word in its most restricted sense, that is in the sense of the Italians whom Machiavelli knew and whom he weighed in the balance as his contemporaries ; or in the sense of the men of that age and that particular period ; or, to employ the jargon of the day, in the form of eternity (*sub specie eternitatis*) ? It seems to me that before proceeding to a more analytical examination of the Machiavellian system of politics, as we seem to find it condensed in ' The Prince,' it may be well to determine precisely what view Machiavelli took of men in general and, perhaps, of the Italians in particular. Now what is quite manifest from an even superficial reading of ' The Prince ' is the acute pessimism of Machiavelli in regard to human nature. Like all those who have had occasion to hold continuous and wide converse with his fellows, Machiavelli is a scorner of men and loves to present them—as I shall show presently—in their negative and mortifying aspect.

" Men, according to Machiavelli, are sorrowful beings, more taken up with things than with their own flesh and blood, and quick to change their feelings and their passions. In Chapter XVII of ' The Prince,' Machiavelli thus expresses himself : ' Because this may be said generally of men : that they are ungrateful, voluble, deceitful, shirkers of dangers, greedy of gain : and as long as you continue to bestow benefits on them, all for you, offering you their blood, their property, their children, their life, as I said above, when your need is distant ; but when it comes near to you they turn away. And the Prince who trusts entirely in their words, if he refrains from other preparations, is ruined. . . . Men have less respect to offer to a man who makes himself loved than to one who makes himself feared, because love is held by a chain of an obligation which, because

men are of poor stuff, they will break away from as soon as occasion offers ; but fear is held by a dread of punishment which is never lost.'

" On the subject of human egoisms I find among the various Discourses what follows : ' Men utter more complaints over a farm which is taken from them than over a brother or a father whom they have lost through death, because death is sometimes forgotten but the thing possessed never is. The reason is quickly to be seen : because everyone knows that a brother is not to be brought back to life by the revolutions of fortune, but a man may very well recover his farm.'

" And in Chapter III of the Discourses : ' As is demonstrated by all those who reason regarding civil life, and as all histories are full of examples to illustrate, it is necessary for him who has the directing of a Republic and who has the ordering of its laws to presuppose all men to be bad and to exploit the evil qualities in their minds whenever suitable occasion offers. . . . Men never effect good actions save from necessity ; but where freedom abounds, and where licence can come about, everything is filled immediately with confusion and disorder.'

" I could continue citing but it is not necessary. The bits I have given you suffice to show that the negative judgment upon men is not incidental but fundamental in Machiavelli's mind. And in all his works it represents a justified and sorrowful conviction. We have to take account of this initial and essential point if we are to follow the successive developments of Machiavelli's thought. It is evident also that Machiavelli, judging men as he did, was not referring merely to the men of his own time, to the Florentines, Tuscans, Italians, who lived and rode their horses in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, but to men of all descriptions, without restriction of space or time. Much time has passed since then, but if I were allowed to judge my fellows and my compatriots, I could not attenuate in the least Machia-

velli's verdict. I might even wish to go further than he. Machiavelli indulges in no illusions nor does the Prince. The antithesis between the Prince and the people, between the State and the individual, is, in Machiavelli's view, preordained. What came to be called Machiavellian utilitarianism, pragmatism, cynicism, springs logically from this initial standpoint. The word 'Prince' must be understood as the 'State.'"

In Machiavelli's view, Mussolini proceeded to point out, the Prince really personified the State. The State stood for organization and for restrictions which the individual tended continually to evade. The individual has a disposition to disobey the laws, not to pay his dues, not to take his part in war. Few were those, heroes or saints, who sacrificed their own selves upon the altar of the State. All the others were in a condition of potential revolt against the State. The Revolution of the 17th and 18th centuries sought to end this discord which was at the base of every social organization. Coming to the question of what precisely was involved in the word *popolo*—"people"—as used in those days, Mussolini continued :

"The 'people' was never defined. It was merely an abstract entity as a political entity. One does not know where exactly it begins or where it ends. The adjective of 'sovereign' as applied to 'the people' is a tragic burlesque. The entire people, at the most, *delegates* sovereignty, but it certainly cannot *exercise* sovereignty. Representative systems belong more to the machinery of politics than to ethics. Even in the lands where this political machinery has been in greatest use for centuries and centuries, there come solemn moments when no appeal is made any longer to the people because it is felt that the reply would be disastrous : the cardboard crowns of sovereignty which have served their purpose in normal times are torn off and it is decided forthwith to acquiesce in a revolution or to make a peace or to go forward into the unknown of a war. All that

the people have left to it is a monosyllable ratifying and obeying. You see that the sovereignty graciously bestowed upon the people is taken away from it at the moments when it might feel the need of it. The sovereignty is left only when it is innocuous or believed to be so—that is, in times of normal administration. Can you imagine a war proclaimed by referendum? A referendum works excellently when it is a question of a village fountain, but when the supreme interests of a people are in question even the most ultra-democratic governments are careful not to refer matters to the judgment of the people itself. . . . Governments exclusively based on the consent of the governed have never existed, do not exist and will probably never exist. Long before my once famous article *Forzo e Consenso* (Force and Common Consent) Machiavelli wrote in 'The Prince' (Chapter VI): 'From which it comes about that all the armed prophets conquer and the unarmed are lost. Because the nature of the people is variable and it is easy to convince them of a thing but it is difficult to maintain them in that conviction. And, therefore, it is desirable so to order things that when they have ceased to believe it may be possible to make them believe by force. Moses, Cyrus, Theseus, Romulus, would not have been able to maintain their Constitutions for long had they been disarmed.'"

The intuitions of the youth, probably, did not differ much from these balanced meditations of the man. Mussolini is one of those who turn wonderfully to account the successive lessons of life, because from the very beginning he was so constituted as to welcome them.

CHAPTER XVIII

A TEACHER AGAIN

A Year in the Friuli—Tolmezzo—A School Teacher once more—Greek and Latin Studies—From the Friuli to the Italian Riviera—The Romagna Threshing-Machines again—Mussolini takes a Hand in the Conflict—Sentenced to Ten Days' Imprisonment—Mussolini studies Nietzsche.

THE year which Mussolini spent at Caneva, in the Commune of Tolmezzo, in the Friuli region, constituted a period of youthful effervescence—*die Brausejahre* the Germans call this phase in a young man's existence. Probably, it was an experience essential to his development.

On the other hand the Friuli is a region singularly well adapted to excite in a young man all the force of the elementary virtues. Slow, strong, sound, stubborn, as unconquerable as their own Carnic Alps, with their sombre forests and their emerald-green meadows, but beneath the surface, all made of granite—such are the folk of the Friuli. Strong, above all, yet outwardly placid, they have not lost their primitive ruggedness. They excel in drinking, love-making, and fighting, just as they excel also miraculously in their powers of work. Not the men only but the women, too, know how to prove themselves beasts of burden capable of astounding feats of endurance. You have but to look at them as they tramp over the mountains, tall and erect, with their immense loads accurately balanced on their heads, like the women of old, or, when their freight is bulky, packed into a basket carried on their backs. Often, on the top of the great heap may be seen the curly head of a baby—the latest born. The mother takes it with

her thus, nomad-fashion, and gives it her breast on the way.

The nomadic instinct, indeed, is singularly prominent in the population of the Friuli. In groups of two or four or five, with a baby in their big basket and sometimes a little toddler holding on to their skirts, the Friuli women traverse the whole of Italy, selling *mescuglieri*, as they say in their own dialect, spoons, yarn, needle-cases and other such odds and ends, but above all domestic utensils of wood made by their menfolk during the long winter. And what is strange and characteristic about it is that in these peregrinations, which continue for months and months and which sometimes are extended beyond the frontier, no man ever accompanies them. These sturdy provincial Amazons are entirely independent in their little commercial ventures.

The men emigrate separately, sometimes as pedlars and street-vendors, they also (the Italians who deal in roast chestnuts in the streets of all the capitals of Europe and America are almost all from the Friuli) more often as very efficient builders, workmen and road-makers. Certain villages are quite deserted in the summer; only the women who are *enceintes* remain at home, with the old and the infirm, to look after the swarms of children of all ages.

Any other women who stay at home do so for other purposes than rest. Up and down miles and miles of precipitous roads and rocky pathways, in and out of forests so dense as to be penetrable only with difficulty, they come and go two or three times a day, laden with bricks for some new small house in construction up in the mountains, or to dig in some tiny patch of ground wherein potatoes struggle for existence among the stones. Sometimes, so as not to waste time *en route*, their hands are at work all the while knitting thick woollen stockings. The jobs and the earnings available locally in the summer-time—the only time when outdoor work is practicable in the mountains—are left to the

women. Even if it be a matter of carrying a heavy weight, the men in these parts will hold aloof, saying with a shake of the head: "No, that's a woman's job." Their duties are different. They are labourers of a different class.

By dint of hard work and sparing, the women in the course of a good summer season will contrive like the ants to amass stores to last them through the severe winter. But during the winter you must not expect sobriety from the *Friulani!* The weather is Arctic, the houses are kept closed, the countryside is buried in snow: to keep warm there is nothing for it but to drink and eat and make love. The man who does not drink, eat and make love in whole-hearted fashion is not held to be a man worthy of the name!

At Caneva, where in 1905-6 Mussolini resumed the occupation, so burdensome for him, of an elementary teacher, and at Tolmezzo, and throughout the entire province, to different parts of which he often betook himself to attend meetings or festivals, there were few who did not hear tell of him even then. Long before he achieved fame he had come to be regarded by the villagers and mountaineers of the locality as one of those "types" not easily forgotten.

The schoolchildren were fond of him, but they stood in terror of his eyes, of his moods, of his bangs upon his desk which made them jump, and of his violent shouts when he lost patience with them. The *Friulani* are intelligent and quick, but like almost all mountain dwellers they know how to pick up only the kind of knowledge which comes home to them and is of use to them. Picture young Mussolini coping with his class of thirty or forty children of seven or eight years old, trying to teach them to read. "The Tyrant" the boys called him and the girls of the place took that view of him, too.

On one occasion, somebody brought a complaint before the school authorities against Mussolini in connection with one of those moody outbreaks of his—

he was charged with blaspheming in the class-room. The principal superintendent enquired into the matter and came to the conclusion that Signor Mussolini had, in truth, exceeded sometimes in his language, but that as in his imprecations he had named always the Buddha or else Mahomet the imprecations in question were not of a nature to hurt the small Christians confided to his care !

He lived in the central part of Caneva, 2½ miles from the school-house. To get there he had to cross a long bridge over the river, and the wind blew very fiercely at this point. Cloakless and hatless, even in the height of the winter, the young teacher made his way to and fro, twice a day, with quick, mechanical strides, always with a book in his hand and deeply immersed in his reading. Only when he reached the bridge would he shut the book up. Then, leaning over the parapet, he would gaze down upon the living mystery of the water, always rushing, always the same and yet always different. The wind would set his long hair flying. It was a joy to him to stand up against the *tramontana*, proof against its icily cold embrace.

. . . . . .

Meanwhile the young man found time to take lessons from a learned prelate in the neighbourhood, Monsignor Candotti, who instructed him in Greek and helped him to perfect himself in Latin. He made speeches and gave lectures. After one of these, in which he had expressed himself somewhat freely regarding public institutions, orders were given for his arrest. He escaped into the mountains for a week, living in wild, uninhabited regions, whither one of his friends came in secret to bring him food, and, what was more welcome still, some of the good wine of the country. Once, there was a repetition here of the scene enacted in the market-place of Gualtieri. Mussolini was in the midst of a crowd assembled in the Piazza to hear an address that was to be delivered,

but the speaker stumbled and stammered over his words and was stupid and foolish, and at last the audience lost all patience and began calling out : "*Il Maestro! Il Maestro! Parli il Maestro!*"—"Let the Master speak!" And they forced him up on the platform. He did not descend from it until an hour and a half later, and those who heard him still recall the substance of that improvised oration, with its force and life and daring, and they still talk of the storm of cheering in which it ended.

But perhaps just because of the daring of the orator and the fervour of the audience, the schoolmaster was not confirmed in his post the year after. He departed, perhaps leaving more than one heart in sadness.

There was, on the other hand, one heart that rejoiced. The fiancé of the *padroncina** in whose house Mussolini had his quarters was very jealous of him. Once, Mussolini seeing him raise his hand against the young woman went for him and knocked him down. Ten years later, in 1915, Mussolini, now in the ranks, passed through Tolmezzo again. The *padroncina* was by the riverside that evening to greet him with some bread and fruit and wine—she knew it was his regiment that had arrived.

"Where are you off to, Benito?" she asked.

"Where do you suppose?" he answered. "To the front. Are you pleased to see me fighting for your Friuli—for our Friuli?"

"Yes, I am," she said. "But come with me. I have your room ready for you—your old room! I knew you would be passing through. After all these long marches, you will sleep well to-night."

He hesitated for a moment.

"No," he said at last : "I am a soldier like these others. Give me that bit of ribbon you have on you——" (an Italian tri-colour emblem). "Pin it on me here, on my breast, to remember you by. Addio!"

And, stretching out his mantle, he laid himself down

* *Padroncina* is a diminutive for landlady.

on the ground, in front of a church, resting his head upon a step worn away by generations of pious feet.

From Tolmezzo he went to Oneglia, a charming little city on the Italian Riviera, no longer as an elementary teacher now, but as a professor—Professor of French in a private school, the Collegio Ulisse Calvi. During the holidays he returned home and resumed the political work for which he was made, and which was already, and will always be, the passion of his life. Politics in the summer of 1908 involved him in his first criminal trial in Italy. It was the old question of the threshing-machines which had continued year after year to call forth conflicts in the Romagna between the "Republican" *padroni* and the " Socialist " bands of workmen. At the bottom of the warfare, of course, is a matter of money and material profit, but, in addition, there is the question of *prestige*—a *point d'honneur*. Moreover, the Romagnoli are by nature combative. There is in them enough of the fighter and enough of the artist to make them revel in the art of war, in and for itself—just for the fun and excitement of the fighting ! The war over the threshing-machine is exciting with all its tactics and strategy. You advance behind the great heavy machine, as you might behind a tank, or behind one of those mediæval conveyances which served at once as ramparts and fortresses. Brute force is not enough. You must employ many ruses as well. You must be the first to arrive at the isolated houses which are dotted along the empty countryside—the farm-houses where the fine sun-swept threshing floors are the strategical points to occupy. He who gets to them first, has won the battle. There is no repelling the machines when, with the mechanicians and their supporters, they are once at the door ! And the buzzing of the engine which works the pullers, the *teuff-teuff* of the pistons, the whistling of the steam, are the triumphant song of victory which greets, and mocks at, the defeated and despised reactionaries.

It is a tremendous battle in the eyes of every self-respecting Romagnolo. Mussolini, the Forlivese, entered warmly into the fray, and joined the ranks of the fighters. To be precise, he put himself at the head of the workmen who had struck for the right to work. There resulted an altercation with the authorities, an arrest, a trial, and a sentence for ten days' imprisonment.

It was, as I have intimated, his first encounter with the police of his own country : the first, but not the last —in fact, the first of a series. Until then he had experience only of foreign prisons. This new adventure did not trouble him much. A friend recounts how he went to visit Mussolini while under arrest, having got wind of what was to the fore and being anxious to see for himself how things had turned out.

Mussolini raised his head quietly.

" Let me finish reading this chapter," he said, " and I'll be with you."

And the chapter finished, the prisoner, handcuffed and guarded, for greater safety, by a squadron of cavalry, went forth from the prison. So tranquil and dignified he was that the crowd which had formed to see him pass—friends, foes, and curious spectators alike—held their breath as they looked on in respectful silence.

But if he was to have many and violent disputes with the Republicans of the region, Mussolini was not opposed to their political tenets and he respected their studious tendencies as well as their uncompromising creed, free from all opportunism and from all playing to the gallery, and inspired by abstract idealism, no matter if from its very nature, and in view of the actual condition of things in Italy, this creed could not be expected to take hold of the masses of the people. The Gods and all State functionaries love the victorious cause, but the attitude of Cato, who loved the vanquished, calls for sympathy and respect—a deep respect even if it be tinged with irony. The young Socialist leader fought

the Republicans alike on the ground of what was practical and of what ideology prescribed ; but he was glad to accept the hospitality of their periodicals for his writings, glad to address an audience more select and more cultured than the Socialistic proletariat.

In *Il Pensiero romagnolo*, the local organ of the Republicans, he published for instance, towards the end of 1908, his memorable essay, *La Filosofia della forza*. It is important to study it, for in it are to be found clearly outlined the principal ideas which he was to develop later—years later in point of time, centuries later in point of actual events : ideas which owed something to the anti-dogmatic teachings of his earliest mentor, Vilfredo Pareto, and to those of Nietzsche himself and Georges Sorel. The theory of the *élan vital* which Bergson clearly expounds was adumbrated already in the hatred of system that was expressed by the young Syndicalist in that article.

" The *Wille zur Macht*,"* he wrote, " is a cardinal point of the Nietzschean philosophy," but it would seem to us to be inaccurate to affirm that all the ideas of Nietzsche can be reduced to this single idea. This philosophy cannot be defined because the poet of Zarathustra has not left us a system. What is outworn or sterile or negative in all philosophies is precisely " the system "—the ideal construction, often arbitrary and illogical, so much so as to deserve to be interpreted rather as a confession, a myth, a tragedy, a poem.

Mussolini proceeds to commend the philosopher for having kept within the limits of the relative and the traditional. " Nietzsche," he writes, " never gave a schematic form to his meditations. He was too French, too meridional, too much of a *Mediterraneo*, to confine the innovating speculations of his thought within the framework of a weighty scholastic dissertation. But whether a creator of philosophical systems or not, Nietzsche is assuredly the mind most marked by genius of the last

* " The Will to Power."

quarter of a century and the influence exerted by his theories has been profound. For some time past the artists of all countries from Ibsen to d'Annunzio have followed in Nietzsche's tracks. The individualists who have grown a little tired of the rigidity of the Stirnerian gospel turned eagerly to Zarathustra and in his philosophy they found the germ and the cause of every revolt and of every moral and political attitude. Finally, to complete the picture, behold the salaried philosophers who have the religion of the 27th of the month,* the academical people, stupid representatives of official science, behold them conjuring the young not to yield to the fascinations of the new free-thinkers on the ground that Friedrich Nietzsche, the recognized leader of these new men, spent the closing years of his life in the shades of madness, Nietzsche, therefore, is the man most discussed in our days. The *man*, I say, because in this case it is precisely the man who can explain the great enigma."

Nietzsche's ideas regarding the State interest naturally the politician and he proceeds to analyse them at some length. " For Stirner, for Nietzsche and for all those whom Turk in his book, *Der geniale Mensch*, calls the *antisofi* of egoism, the State is organized oppression, to the detriment of the individual. But whence comes the State ? Does it come from a social contract as Rousseau and his deluded disciples maintain ? Nietzschein his " Zur Genealogie der Moral "(page 71) describes for us the genesis of the State. " It is " he says, " a herd of blond beasts of prey—it is a race of lords and conquerors who fall upon the disorganized, weak, nomadic populations. It is an act of violence wrought by men who, in and by their warlike organizations, have not the idea of consideration for their neighbour, of responsibility, of guilt. Their egoism as men of power does not admit of restrictions. Far from suppressing their primordial instinct of cruelty they give it free scope.

* In other words, pay-day.

Their motto is the *mot d'ordre* of the Oriental sect of assassins : 'Nothing exists : all is permitted.' And they add : 'To see men suffer is good, to make them suffer is better.'"

A principle of solidarity, however, governs the relations of those blond beasts of prey. Even the conquerors fall in with the measures which the community adopts to safeguard the supreme interests of the caste, and this may be said to be a first limitation of the freedom of the individual. Not only do the warriors restrict themselves by a rigid discipline—a demonstration and proof of a prescribed solidarity of interests—but they are forced to spare and to protect the slaves who produce their material necessaries of life. It is not enough to create new tables of moral values, it is necessary also humbly to produce bread.

CHAPTER XIX

MUSSOLINI AT TRENT—HIS FIRST WRITINGS

Cesare Battisti—How Mussolini was brought into touch with him—Austria's Motto : " Divide et Impera "—Mussolini and Klopstock—Other German Studies—His First Efforts as a Writer—His *feuilletons*.

IN the course of his flying visits to Udine, Italy's future " War Capital," and during the whole of his stay in the province of Friuli, the elementary teacher at Tolmezzo had been able to see something at close quarters of the feelings called forth in his compatriots of the North by the mutilation of their country. That lopped-off arm of beautiful Friuli was a perennial source of agony. I can recall how keenly I myself used to suffer when quite a little girl at the thought that, without any change in the character, in the scenery or in the inhabitants, our Pontebba became suddenly Pontefel at the other side of a ridiculous little brooklet.

It was a kind and wise Providence that called Benito Mussolini to the frontier and enabled him to participate in the emotions of the Italians there torn from their native land.

The Socialists of the Chamber of Labour called him to Trent as their secretary, with a salary of a hundred and twenty kronen a month, and in so doing they conferred on him the priceless benefit of bringing him into contact with the noble Italian, hero and martyr, Cesare Battisti, that incarnation of the hopes of the group of *Irredenti* who strove for the recovery of the lost provinces. Working on the *Popolo*, the journal founded by Battisti, Mussolini took his share now in the movement which was to bear fruit after the war in the restitution of Trent, Trieste and Pola to the mother country.

Cesare Battisti was a Socialist, a leader of the Socialists in those Italian provinces under Austrian rule, but, as such, in ardent opposition to the official Socialist Party.

In order to understand his position, we have to recall to mind what the Austrian Empire then was : a confused medley of races and nationalities. Austria-Hungary constituted the sole surviving remnant of that monstrous amalgam, the Holy Roman Empire of Charles Quint. At the beginning of this century it was the only dynastic state whose *raison d'être* consisted solely in its historic association with a single crown. For centuries past it had been in process of decay, but a good army and an excellent administration and the force of inertia all combined to keep the edifice still standing despite its cracks and fissures. Italy had broken free from the mass and Hungary had become detached; Croatia and Bohemia were unsettled; there was ferment everywhere. Even that ancient prop, the bureaucracy, was being demoralized; the army, sedulously cultivated by the Grand Dukes, still throve, but even within the Imperial house itself the prestige of the dynasty was melting away like snow in sunshine.

The Royal House of Austria still lived up to its motto, *Divide et impera*, and it contrived to play and balance all the different nationalities one against another, and to maintain its supremacy over them all. It had, indeed, found a new application for the device by exploiting the conflict of classes within each of the contending nationalities. Socialism, which had made its appearance elsewhere in the guise of a threatening phantom of ruin, had been welcomed as an ally by the cunning old Hapsburg eagle.

In Trieste, for instance, there existed no longer a homogeneous Italian population. Its inhabitants consisted on the one hand of the Italian workmen of the cities and their old enemies, the Slavonic proletariat of the country districts; on the other of the Italian

bourgeoisie, also of the urban districts. There were horizontal as well as vertical dividing lines, and the Government found it very easy to benefit by the fact. The Socialists came to be the "spoiled children" of the Imperial Police to such an extent that they were called *i leccapiattini*, "the lick-plates"! International Socialism had already become an anti-national form of Socialism, or, if not quite that (for it had strong German tendencies), at least anti-Italian. Cesare Battisti had not lent himself to this game. A Socialist, yes; but an Italian also! It was essential, historically and morally essential—so he maintained—that the phases of evolution should not be confused by over-haste. First they must achieve the triumphs of the principle of the nineteenth century, the principle of nationality, and *then*, when the Italian race should have been reunited, the majority of the people should wring from the hands of the selfish minority its rights to life and welfare. The racial question—the spiritual question, so to speak—must first be solved. Nor should the question of the stomach, the struggle for bread, ever silence it.

The life and death of Battisti—the man most abhorred by the rulers of the Dual Monarchy—were in wonderful harmony with his high faith. It was not merely in his death that he proved himself a hero. His entire life was of a kind to merit crowning by the martyrdom in which it closed. They hanged him in the Castello del Buon Consiglio above Trent. The hangman stood posing in the act for the photographers with a vile grin upon his face.

This was on July 12th, 1916, when Italy had entered the War. As though to enhance the mystical character of the sacrifice, there was no lack of vituperation for the dead man even from the Italians—but were they really Italians?—for whom he gave his life. The *Avanti*, for instance, made the comment that "to die for one's own personal ideal was a bourgeois luxury"—*il morire per il proprio ideale era un lusso borghese*. . . . But other

feelings prevailed in 1918 when, after the victory of Vittorio Veneto, our troops marched into Trent and stood reverently by his grave.

Towards the close of 1908, when Mussolini made his appearance at Trent, Cesare Battisti's head was still firmly placed upon his square shoulders. With his bronzed countenance and small pointed beard—reminiscent of the conspirators of Mazzini's time—with his thoughtful brow and vigorous, active frame, he cut a romantic figure. His new colleague, the Secretary of the Chamber of Labour, ignorant as to how things stood, had at first attached himself as a matter of course to the *Avvenire* of Trent, the journal of the Socialists, who were more in sympathy with Austria and who took their tone from Vienna, but it was not long before he discovered the ugly side of things and then he joined the *Popolo*, of which Battisti was founder and editor. Battisti was a judge of men and recognized at once what a valuable recruit had come to him. From Mussolini's advent, indeed, he was soon to reap the benefit of finding time for those scientific studies of his regarding the geography of the Trentino which are now held in such high esteem by serious students of the subject.

Mussolini, for his part, was quite content with his monthly salary of 120 kronen and with his whirl of work as journalist, propagandist and politician. He gave some French lessons in addition and played the violin in his free hours.

All this seemed so little to him that he took on new studies, Indian Arithmetic, for instance (with its philosophy and its strange formulæ in accordance with geometrical and graphic rules) and the languages and literatures of Spain and Germany. In that year, 1908, with the ardour and energy of youth, he actually composed and printed a thesis, "*Sulla Poesia di Federigo Klopstock.*" In Germany itself there are, perhaps, a score or so of persons who have read—really read—

Klopstock's immensely long poem, *The Messiah;* compared with it, as regards length and weight, *Paradise Lost* is an airy trifle! In the Italy of to-day I really believe there is only one person who has read it, namely the Premier.

That study of Klopstock, with a slighter essay on the women characters in Schiller's *Wilhelm Tell*, were to have been included in a volume to be entitled *Studi Critici sulla Letteratura Tedesca*. It is strange, by the way, how this Sorelian demolisher, this devotee of Nietzsche and Heine, was carried away by the idealistic and sentimental poetry of Schiller. Once, many years later, when he was lying wounded in hospital, I remember his delight over a copy of Schiller's *Joan of Arc* which was brought to him. He seized and handled the volume eagerly. "I know it! I know it!" he cried, as though welcoming an old friend. . . . Those *Studi Critici* belong to the realm of the books that might have been.

Another essay which he then wrote had for its subject and title, "Platen and Italy."

"August Platen stands out conspicuously from all the swarm of foreign lovers and admirers of Italy. Born at Ausbach, in 1796, Platen served as an officer against Napoleon. Later he left the army and devoted himself to philosophy and poetry, passing almost his whole life in Italy and dying at Syracuse in 1835. Like most of his German contemporaries he belonged in his youth to the Romantics but, surfeited with their excesses, he abandoned their School and launched out for himself. In time he developed into a 'Mediterranean' in the sense given to this term by Nietzsche. No wonder if he lost his heart to Italy—the Mediterranean land *par excellence*. And, wishing to know intimately and profoundly the object of his love, he journeyed from end to end of the peninsula by short stages, staying in all its towns, big and little alike: made happy by its sunshine and its scenery. There was no corner of Italy that

Platen did not visit. It was to him the 'Promised Land.' In his poems all its cities find mention. Among all our illustrious visitors, Stendhal alone can be compared with him in the matter of love for Italy."

One other and more substantial outcome there was of the young student's labours—a History of Philosophy! All the philosophical systems were dealt with in it critically and analytically, and all the new methods were subjected to a Nietzsche-like examination. So at least one surmises, judging from what one knows of the author and from his own laconic references to the matter. The actual manuscript, complete in every detail and ready for the printer, met with the strange fate of destruction at the hands of a young woman of the people who had some right to be jealous of the author. Rummaging about among his papers for evidence bearing upon her suspicions, she came upon the voluminous note-book. Darting her eyes over its pages, she noted any number of strange names and at once jumped to the conclusion that they were feminine names and that she had lighted upon an amorous correspondence. On the instant, the offending document was consigned to the flames and she was not satisfied until every bit of it had been reduced to ashes. If there be a limbo wherein the still-born creatures of the brain find harbourage, Mussolini's *Storia della Filosofia* will have gone thither to keep company with that famous first volume of Carlyle's French Revolution!

It is characteristic of Mussolini that he himself wastes no regrets upon mishaps of this order. It does not trouble him at all that the fruit of his labour was lost; which is a proof that at least the labour itself was not lost.

To the history of religion, so closely bound up with that of philosophy, the young man also devoted time and thought, as was witnessed by a volume on John Huss which actually saw the light and was even translated into Czech. It was issued by some semi-revolutionary little publishing firm in Rome, but not a copy of it is now procurable, so little importance has its author attached

to it ! For Mussolini, it would seem, the wielding of a pen is like the wielding of a sword : the thrust made, the word written, the artist's emotion is past and forgotten.

" I preserve all your letters ; they keep me in touch with the past," said to him recently one of his faithful old friends, an associate of his long ago at Forlimpopoli.

" Why ? " he asked : " The past is not an end in itself but just a transitional link in the endless chain which we call progress. To linger over the past is to go backwards. We must go forwards, instead, to improve ourselves, and to elevate ourselves, more and more ! " And his eyes kindled as he uttered the words.

Mussolini, in truth, retains that sublime gift of the child—the gift of ever beginning anew. Once the house has been built, he is perfectly willing that it should be knocked down again, to be built up once more—and better. What is more difficult for him—what involves a real victory over the demon of restlessness which goads him on—is to complete and consolidate.

For the rest, Mussolini can have had no temptation of recent years to destroy the edifices he has built up. Too many others have plotted against him and sought to destroy them. To complete them and to defend them has been his incessant task, calling forth all his capacity and neutralizing his own impatience.

Perhaps this is why he delights in political work, which involves the labour of Sisyphus. He who builds with men builds with sand.

Over and above all these serious compositions, the deft penman found another outlet for his feelings in stories, which were printed in *La Vita Trentina*, the illustrated weekly supplement of the *Popolo*. To one tale he gave the Nietzschean title, *Nulla è vero, tutto è permesso.** It is a pathetic affair, in its way. The real nature of the writer, passionate, impulsive, all compact

* Nothing is true, everything is permissible.

of elementary instincts and feelings, may be seen in it, ill-disguised behind a mask of cynicism. It begins thus :

" Five years have now passed since the time when the events took place which I am about to narrate and which constitute one of the most memorable pages in the story of my life. I am now able to free myself from the obligation of silence through reasons easy to imagine : I do not know whether my organic tissues have been renewed during this period, I do not wish to enquire in what relations may stand my spiritual ' I ' and my material ' I ' (forgive me, O old Tolstoi, this theft from the philosophical nomenclature of your ' Resurrection '), nor am I concerned to know the transformations which my idiosyncrasies may have undergone : I allow myself merely to note a radical change in my ideas. But I must avoid, above all, what in the jargon of the civil State, are called generalities.

" I am a clerk at the Bank of Italy and am head of the *Ufficio Emissioni Internazionali.* I am twenty-nine, a bachelor, and I live with my mother. I have obtained my Doctor's degree at the University of Bologna, and, on achieving this, I entertained for a moment the idea of becoming an advocate but I abandoned it and decided to enter the higher ranks of the bureaucracy of banking. My salary of 530 lire a month, combined with certain revenues from my father's securities, enable me to live in comfort."

But the young political agitator was not able to dress himself in the moral garments of a bank clerk. Still less did he know how to assume the indolent and indifferent psychology of such a type. The mere attempt evokes a smile, together with a certain feeling of tenderness for this young man who lied to himself after a fashion so childish and incompetent !

Mussolini's imagination lent itself better to another kind of story which he attempted, a highly-coloured romance *à la* Gaboriau, with a basis reminiscent of Dumas *père.* " Claudia Particella, or the Cardinal's

Love " it was called. It might almost have been written with a view to its use as a film and, as a matter of fact, it has, I believe, been turned to this account by some enterprising cinema company. It was just a hotch-potch, without beginning or end, but it met with a colossal success. The author, efficient journalist that he is, is never lacking (even when he is amusing himself with his screed) in the infallible *flair* for what will strike the public. With all his own mental superiority, he knows how to stand for the public and the people himself. He has, moreover, a great relish for the tragic, as well as for vivid colours and heavy shades. This intuitive communion with the feelings of the mob enables him now in his capacity as statesman and head of the Government to keep his finger upon the pulse of the nation. As a story-writer it enabled him to think out the right words and phrases and events and climaxes. He showed that he possessed the " common touch." The feuilleton, then, was a huge success. Every now and again, however, the author got tired of his heroine, Claudia, and felt inclined to kill her off but Cesare Battisti would implore him not to do so. " For Heaven's sake, don't ! " Battisti would exclaim : " the subscriptions are being renewed splendidly ! " Thus baulked of his chief victim, Mussolini's homicidal tendencies found scope among the subsidiary characters, and the fates of Claudia and her lover continued to set palpitating the hearts of all the young dress-makers and office-clerks and shop-assistants and artisans of the town.

CHAPTER XX

BACK IN ITALY

A Letter from an Austrian Gaol—Expelled from Austria—A Chivalrous Hungarian—Battisti's Word of Farewell—*La Voce*—Prezzolini and Papini—"The Trentino seen by a Socialist."

FRIDAY MORNING, *about 9 o'clock.*

DEAR GIB,

I write to give you my news. . . . I am well. I know nothing, however, of my innocent family. A prison is quite a pleasant place to abide in. To-day, for instance, I find amusement watching the rain. I have swallowed down two German volumes and have been reading Maupassant. . . . On Tuesday, at 5 o'clock, the sentence is up, but at 4—that is an hour earlier—another case will come before the Tribunal against me, a Cyrenæus destined to take on himself the responsibility of the misdemeanours of others. . . .

A few more lines. To-day I am preoccupied with a meteorological problem: I would like to know if the atmospheric depression is in the centre of Europe or if it is limited to the South. . . . I would give anything to have a tiny atlas with the lines of the rain.

Meanwhile, kindest regards,

MUSSOLINI.

To SIGNOR GIB,
Caffè Zanella,
Largo Carducci.
From the I. R. PRISON OF TRENT.

Once again Mussolini had found his way to gaol! "This scoundrel of a Mussolini"—*quel monellaccio di*

Mussolini, as the Austrians called him—had been giving too much trouble. His offence had been the printing of the words *Il confine d'Italia non finisce à Ala !*—the frontier of Italy must not be drawn at Ala ! On leaving prison, he was ordered to be deported out of Austria. Battisti bade him farewell in the *Popolo* in these terms : " If it gives us deep grief, to him it brings honour ; if for us it is a great loss, for him it is a triumph."

They took him from Trent to the frontier at Ala—Ala where Italy's frontier " must not be drawn "—between two gendarmes, handcuffed, into the presence of the Imperial and Royal Commissary of Police. Now occurred a pleasing incident. The police office being closed, he was let into the private apartment which was adjacent to it. The official in question, a Hungarian baron, was at dinner. A pretty little lady, dressed in white, opened the door—it was the Baron's young wife. After a glance at the dangerous malefactor thus inopportunely ushered in, she went to call her husband. I do not know whether her womanly pity had found expression, but so it looked from the Baron's behaviour. The clock had just struck one and the train for Italy was to start at seven. He scanned Mussolini up and down ; then, looking straight into his eyes, he said : " If I let you go free during these six hours, will you give me your word of honour to be on the train at the time fixed ? You will make no attempt at flight ? I have your word of honour ?" Mussolini having given his word, the Baron set him free, with the assurance that he would not be kept under watch even at a distance.

And so, in fact, it happened that when, half an hour before the time, the ex-prisoner entered the station, he did so a completely free man. The Baron was walking quietly up and down the platform, and, when he noticed Mussolini, he raised his hat a little in salutation. He had risked his post by his act of chivalrous kindness. Mussolini often recalls the fact, and when he speaks of it, it is with a thrill of emotion and gratitude in his voice.

With Battisti there were to be no more meetings for Mussolini until the fateful year 1914. A certain coldness came to mark their relations because Battisti, moved by an impulse of pity, which was to be misunderstood, appointed in his place on the *Popolo* an individual who was an object for pity beyond a doubt, but who was also an object for well-merited contempt. This was Vasilico Vergani, who in the hour of trial was to show himself a Judas and to betray his benefactor, thus justifying the indignation which Mussolini felt over the appointment. The coldness, however, did not last long, and in 1914, when Europe was in the throes of war, and the honour and the future of Italy were in the balance, and when Battisti returned from Trento to sound the alarm, he found in his former assistant a brother-in-arms and fellow-champion of the ideals to which he gave his life.

At that period most young men were turning to Socialism, even in the middle classes and among the aristocracy. As I heard Turati say later : " Everyone who was not a good-for-nothing turned Socialist."

Even I, a girl of fifteen, living in the seclusion of a family of good standing with clerical and conservative tendencies had embraced Socialism. It was the Socialism inspired by moral revolt against the materialistic conception of society. After the generation of giants which had made Italy, came the generation of small men, who, tired by high political ideals, abandoned them for a cynical commercialism. They scoffed at what they called the " forty-eighters " and everything that rose above the commonplace.

A new note was now needed in national life and a new spiritual aristocracy. Giovanni Papini and Giuseppe Prezzolini represented fresh elements working for a revival, not through politics, but through literary and artistic channels and social work. Papini (well-known now as the author of the Life of Christ) had founded or edited innumerable newspapers or reviews before he was thirty, and had preached Nietzsche, pragmatism,

nationalism of the school of Barrès and Maurras, and the various 'isms of William James, Bergson, Sorel, Rimbaud, Loisy, Renoir—impressionism, Satanism, syndicalism, cubism and *vers libre ;* these new ideas, the growth of years in their countries of origin, were presented to Italy only half assimilated and in quick succession. They were not our ideas and we could not apply them to our national life. Reaction in the shape of an original Italian movement, the fruit of our own experience, was bound to come. The first reaction was the violent anti-cultural movement of Futurism, led from Milan by Marinetti, who broke many academic windows, and, if some people felt the draught, the new generation on the whole breathed more freely ! Not as a result of crude reaction, however, but from the purifying furnace of the war was to be born the movement Italian *par excellence* : Fascism.

Back in Italy, Mussolini set to work at once at the production of a record of what he had seen in the Trentino. " The Trentino seen by a Socialist," was its title. It was issued by that remarkable periodical, *La Voce*, which for a brief hour played a noteworthy rôle in the evolution of the Italy of to-day. It was edited by Prezzolini and Papini. These two young Tuscans were of widely differing temperaments, as we were later to discover, but both were fired with the same flame, which was their very soul, the vital need of the country, the need for re-birth.

It is not without significance that Benito Mussolini, the highest type of his generation, before creating Fascism, and having been right through Socialism, should thus have come into touch with *Futurismo* and *Vocismo*, minor movements of much less importance but not devoid of a certain character of their own, and whose vital elements, consciously or unconsciously, ended by swelling the clear current of the native stream.

Il Trentino veduto da un Socialista is a book of simple statements, sober and objective—a *quaderno*, or *cahier*,

as the *Voce* called it, in significant allusion to those *cahiers* of the French *Tiers Etat* of 1789. It was in its way a call to arms ; it did not consist merely of "*Note e Notizie*" as its cover led the reader to suppose. In it one becomes conscious of the subterranean rumblings of the coming war. It constitutes moreover an ardent defence of *l'Italianità* and one which is all the more effective for being involuntary. The principle of internationalism, although proclaimed in it to satisfy the author's conscience, cannot prevail against the sound of the patriot's voice, assertive of the solidarity of blood and race. The backbone of the book consists of its onslaught upon the Italian bourgeoisie of the lost provinces, accused not of excess of national feeling but of its lack—of opportunist servility and cowardice. Avarice and sluggishness and materialism—these were the things Mussolini was to fight against all his life. No anchorite, but with a mind detached from riches and the good things of the world, he longed already then for power—power over other men—power for its own sake, not as a means to an end, but as the conquerors of history have always loved it.

A portion of the book is devoted to an analysis of the theory of Pan-Germanism and of the writings of Gobineau and other exponents of "pure Arianism," such as Houston Chamberlain. It is most interesting to note the sobriety and open-mindedness with which Mussolini studies the whole subject. He displays no intolerance, no heat, no feeling of scorn for the excesses and absurdities of these Pan-Germanists (not one of them, by the way, of pure German blood). One realizes that he enjoys the play of ideas, as he might a game, and that he likes to trace them back to their original source. He had steeped himself too deeply in Nietzsche not to be attracted by a theory which passed on from the Super-Man to the Super-Race, but we can see none the less how he chafes in his inmost heart the while he sets forth sympathetically and with conscientious object-

iveness the preposterous contention that the Italians are " the race of chaos " and that " the Capital of Chaos" is Rome ! He translates a passage from Houston Chamberlain to the effect that one only needs to go to the National Museum in Berlin and to walk through the Gallery along which are placed the portrait-busts of the Renaissance to convince oneself that the type of the great Italians of that period is completely extinct. The absurd saying has often come back to my mind when I have wandered in Mussolini's company through our own great art collections, through the galleries of the Vatican, at Aquileia, in Venice, in the Museum of the Villa Giulia, in the Forum. When passing by the great examples of Italian sculpture of all ages—Etruscan, Classical, Renaissance—I have turned from time to time and looked at the features of my companion, and it has seemed to me that in their strong and massive modelling they reproduced in most striking fashion those old clays of Vejo, those Augustan heads in marble, and to a still greater degree those bronzes of Donatello and Verrocchio. Gattamelata proudly astride his steed in front of the Basilica of Saint Anthony in Padua might be Mussolini's brother, not only in his expression but still more in the likeness of his physical features.

You may trace a similar resemblance between Mussolini and that other *condottiere* of the Renaissance, Bartolommeo Colleoni, as portrayed by Verrocchio, or was it the young Leonardo ? The expression is noticeable alike in the features and in the expression, with its look of stern pride : the formidable square chin, the grim disdainful mouth, the low forehead, the deep-set eyes beneath the vast arch of the projecting eyebrows.

Probably he himself was never conscious of the fact but there was something within him that protested against Houston Chamberlain's wild generalization.

And it is worth noting in this connection that by a strange form of mimicry, as it were, there has come about a great change in the aspect of the youth of Italy. Upon

the hard anvil of the war and by the discipline of Fascism it has been re-shaped physically as well as morally in the type of its leader, with the result that a body of "Black Shirts" has the appearance of a body of classical types, suggestive of those sculptured in the museums. When Fascism was experiencing its worst set-back, after the assassination of Mateotti, when the feelings of emotional people were being inflamed against us by a systematic Press campaign, I heard one young girl of the people cry out to another in Milan as a Fascist procession swung by :

"*L'è inutil, hin tropp bei, i fascisti, l'è impossibil che l' abbia minga da vegh reson el Mussolini!*"

And the other agreed :

"*L'è vera*," she said, "*hin tropp bei, l'è minga possibil!*"*

That was the effect produced upon them by the endless cortège of stalwart, soldierly, resolute-looking youths, marching past them, with heads erect and dark locks flowing back from their foreheads.

For the rest, the defeat of the Germans in the war has detracted from the prestige of those Pan-Germanic ideas ; but Mussolini studied them in that book of his anxiously and scrutinizingly and presciently so many years ago. It would seem that in Germany they have never before been so much in favour as now, for the elections of 1924 were a quasi-victory to their exponents and there were returned to Parliament representatives even of that extreme group of them who repudiate Christianity itself as Semite, un-German, and anti-Arian, and who would fain go back to Thor and the other *urdeutsch* divinities of old.

The monograph on the Trentino gives an account of the repercussion of these German theories on pre-war propaganda, of the effect on school education of

* This may be rendered freely : "It is no use ! They are too handsome, these Fascisti ! There can't be any doubt about it—Mussolini *must* be right !"

"That's so ! They are far too nice—he *must* be right !"

numerous and powerful societies, and their pressure on political life. It contrasts the rich and powerful German organizations with the poor miserable Italian educational associations. But what if we are deficient in scientific organization? After all, what is this German divinity of Organization compared with Destiny, the goddess that watches over Mediterranean civilization? An ever growing population surges over its frontiers under the pressure of biological, not merely political, forces. Such is the destiny of the Italian race, owing to demographic and historic causes.

It was Mussolini who first asserted that the Latin races are not only not losing, but rapidly gaining, ground. "What will be the results of this conflict?" he asked. "Which language and which nation will disappear?" He claimed that the peasants and workers of the Trentino were preserving Italianism there and would gradually squeeze out the German element. Pan-Germanism must be guarded against but need not be feared. Germans were not adapted to Italian agricultural methods, and were bound to go under. He praised the Socialist daily paper *L'Avvenire del Lavoratore* because it preserved the Italian language among the immigrants, and he upheld still more flagrantly unorthodox tenets against the dogma of internationalism. The unity of the Austrian proletariat aimed at by the workmen's organizations centralized in Vienna is impossible of attainment because of the divergent ideals of the various races, and trades union discipline attempts to realize superficial unity among workers who do not feel themselves brothers.

What heresy! To put nationality above class solidarity! But facts proved that organized workers were not false to their own nationality. The Italian wood-workers of Botzen belonging to the local branch union asked to be allowed to speak Italian in their meetings. The committee, of which the majority of members were German, refused consent, so the Italians formed their own branch. Their manifesto would provide useful

reading for certain "National Liberals" who in the elections published manifestos in Slav at Trieste and in German at Trent.

Mussolini was absolutely uncompromising whenever the question of language was concerned, as he considered it the symbol of triumphant nationalism. He energetically defended the use of the Italian dialect in the valleys of the Upper Adige. "For centuries," he said, "even in the Trentino, this dialect has formed a barrier against the Germans." And he resolutely denied that Salorno, generally accepted as the linguistic frontier, constituted the true frontier. Salorno had been the occasion for the pan-German agitation which claimed the so-called South Tyrol, an ambiguous name adopted by those who denied the Italian character of the Trentino. In the concluding pages he reviews the various possibilities, excluding as the least probable such facile hypotheses as that of annexation through the break-up of the composite Austrian Empire after the death of the old Emperor. "No," he wrote, "the times are past when the death of a Sovereign led to the break-up of a State. What is the State in its essence? The State is the army and the bureaucracy. The Austrian Government has at its disposal an absolutely loyal army and a bureaucracy whose loyalty is inspired not merely by duty but by sentiment." Of another vain hope of voluntary cession he said: "Austria conquers and annexes; she never cedes. Austria has spent tens of millions in the Trentino, not, of course, in wiping out *pellagra*, but in the construction of forts, barracks, and military roads." He concludes: "There is still another hypothesis, that of a war between Italy and Austria, the victory of Italy forcing Austria to cede part of Italia Irredenta." With a timidity unusual to him, Mussolini does not discuss the implications of this hypothesis.

It is clear that his stay in the Trentino was decisive in developing the nationalist tendencies which culminated in Fascism.

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CHAPTER XXI

THE CLASS WAR

Back at Forli—The new Weekly Journal, "La Lotta di Classe"—Italian Socialism in 1898—A Voice from the Desert?—The *Avanti* begins to listen—The Socialist Party "a Great Firm going Bankrupt."

IN 1910 we find Mussolini again at Forli, the mainstay of his family and earning his livelihood for the most part by his work as Secretary to the local Socialist Association; a hundred and twenty lire a month was his pay and he had refused to take more. In addition to the propagandist activities proper to this post, he had taken on the editorship of a new weekly journal, *La Lotta di Classe*—"The Class War"—which he had founded himself. The first number had appeared in January, 1910. He himself carried out all the work except the actual printing, and, indeed, I would not swear that he did not sometimes lend a hand even in the printing department. A wage of a hundred and twenty lire was little enough even in those days, but when there was talk of an increase to a hundred and fifty, or even to two hundred, he would not hear of it. He felt that the extra money would fetter him. The bare subsistence allowed him to feel more free. Too often, it seemed to him, the recognized leaders of the Socialist movement showed themselves mere conscienceless officials.

"I have too much respect for my brains to become a walking phonograph, a mere pedlar of propaganda. I shall continue to tour the branches, but I demand a free hand, so that if my propaganda interferes with my intellectual work and threatens me with progressive idiocy, I shall be forced to give it up. Besides, a few

MUSSOLINI IN 1910

meetings with real solid thought behind them are better than a long stream of chattering superficial rhetoric with pistols in the background. To-day, the revolutionaries leading the political and economic movement when they are not bureaucrats are mercenary employees, sometimes with a Cardinal's salary, speakers making disgraceful profits out of propaganda, revolutionaries who disbelieve in revolution, half-men without half an education and half a conscience."

"Ideals!" he wrote bitterly on one occasion. "Who the devil cares about ideals? The man who still cherishes ideals in his heart is voted an imbecile or a lunatic! But we belong still to that exiguous band."

Now began for Mussolini a period of tragic conflict. The file of *La Lotta di Classe* from January, 1910, to the middle of 1912 is one long record of the struggles, often dramatic, in which he was engaged.

Leopardi, the great poet and profound thinker, remarks that the young tend to be severe and ruthless in their judgments, while men of mature age grow more and more tolerant. Experience teaches them the vanity of their youthful ideals, never attainable even approximately, and they learn to look with pity upon shortcomings instead of with contempt. A relative optimism results from their absolute pessimism.

It was with fervour and desperation that the young Socialist Secretary, now in his twenty-eighth year, fought week by week in his journal for the transformation and transvaluation of the ideals of the Party. The heroic era of Italian Socialism was then at an end. In 1898, after the revolutionary meetings in Milan, which had been caused by a sudden increase in the price of bread, the Socialist leaders had been prosecuted and many of them, including Filippo Turati and Anna Kuliscioff, had been condemned to long periods of imprisonment, from ten years upwards. That had been the last great fight between the Socialist movement and the State, and the amnesty soon granted to the prisoners proclaimed

their victory. Several of them were returned to Parliament triumphantly in the next elections. Between 1898 and 1904 there came about gradually a change of mood. In 1904 the era of the new methods began with the first political strike—political, not economic. Two Neapolitan youths, Arturo Labriole and Walter Mocchi, settled in Milan and sought to bring about the new departure. They talked grandly of "Syndicalism," but, lost in abstractions as they were, like almost all Southerners, and devoid of contact with realities, they had no kind of gift for the slow, patient, tenacious, systematic work essential to Syndicalism. They called themselves Syndicalists but they were in effect Revolutionaries—and Revolutionaries of no avail. They did, indeed, get some support from the ragtag and bobtail, from those that are always ready to applaud the orator who is most violent and extreme. Neither of them had it in him to organize or lead a following, so their following, therefore, was not an army but a mob. The outcome was an endless succession of ill-considered and unsuccessful strikes.

The victories achieved by Socialism over the Capitalist classes had resulted in benefiting the latter through the greater prosperity of the country which resulted. In view of the enormous progress of the Po Valley, alike in agriculture and industry, the inhabitants found it impossible to persist in their old sleepy ways and were forced to develop far more rapidly on economical lines, with the help of new machinery, intensive cultivation, etc., etc.

Socialism had not looked much beyond the Po Valley. Nothing was afoot beyond Florence, beyond Rome.

Economic betterment had become an end in itself. Idealistic Socialism had sunk into mere materialism. To a crowd of Italian emigrants assembled to listen to him in Switzerland in 1910, one of the principal Socialist leaders declared that they had nothing to do with senti-

mentalists and idealists, that Socialism was "a question of the belly and nothing but the belly."

Against this view of things and against its embodiment in the fat, well-fed officials of the Socialist Party, the very lean Mussolini began campaigning with all the ardour of youth.

From the depths of the Romagna, from an obscure provincial journal, this one voice never tired of uttering its reproaches and condemnations. A voice from the desert? No, the out-and-out pessimists after all are wrong. However deeply plunged a people may be in materialism, something in the public conscience responds always to the cry of the idealist when it is clear and deep and when it is uttered by one who by his character and example has won the right to be heard. Within a quite brief period the *Lotta di Classe*, one of dozens of such obscure little weeklies which cater for the Socialists of Italy, stood out conspicuously from all the rest of them. It began to have a wider public and to exert influence outside the Romagna. The *Avanti*, the official Socialist daily, began to quote it often and not seldom became drawn into vehement but amicable controversy with its editor. The name Mussolini came to be known. "Mussolini says this"—"Mussolini says that."

Mussolini claimed that his paper was not "a mere weekly pabulum—no, it was the Party, the flag, a living soul."

The ideal must be first or nowhere. Certainly the official party, then reduced to "timid revolutionaries," was only a "corpse on the stage of Italy's political comedy," and perhaps the only thing to do was to bury it. Or, to take a less drastic view, it was "a great firm going bankrupt," and it was his task to point out perpetually its impotence and bankruptcy. None the less, Socialism itself remained something different; "rough, rude, made up of violent contrasts; a war, and in war, woe to the merciful!"—a return must be made from this "revised and correct Socialism which no

longer frightens anyone, and is mere humanitarianism, to the Socialism I dream of, a terrible, grave, sublime Socialism; only at this cost can it again become a Land Promise, not a business affair, not a game for politicians, nor a dream for the romantic; not a sport, but a force for moral and material regeneration and perhaps the greatest drama that ever agitated collective humanity."

And what was it to achieve? "The building of a bridge from the animal to the human man, a bridge from the primeval to the modern, a bridge by which humanity could pass from the struggle for life to the intention to live." It is true that "bread comes before the alphabet, but after bread must come the alphabet: only thus can the human element be developed which can bring the idea to realization, after the hard work of industrial purification."

These doctrines called down on Mussolini's head a torrent of abuse. The leading article of a hostile newspaper passed from the mild epithets of "sly rogue" to calling him a maniac, a scoundrel, an underhand intriguer, winding up with the term "disgusting reptile." The old-world journalism of quiet old Romagna had little to learn from the Tennessee of Mark Twain! Mussolini answered in the *Lotta di Classe* that he had nothing to hide or be ashamed of, that he wanted neither popularity nor votes and that he dared to tell the brutal truth even to his persecutors.

There is no special originality in his ideas as to the practical realization of Socialism, except perhaps in their detachment from Marxism; he did not accept the Marxian view of materialism nor of anti-capitalist economics, and he recognized the fallacy of Lassalle's "bronze law." What interested him as a Latin was the moral and ethical side of the ideal society of the future. He therefore drew nearer to the apostles of Latin communism, of the Italian Philip Buonarroti, of the French terrorist Babeuf, of Blanqui and the great Proudhon, and the brief experiment of the Paris Commune—nearer, above

all, to Georges Sorel. His vision of the future derives much from Wilde's "Soul of Man under Socialism," with echoes of Ruskin and Morris; perhaps their influence on him was more æsthetic than that of real personal conviction. At bottom their particular vision of the future probably had as little appeal for his temperament as a paradise without houris would have for a Mussulman.

Much more ardent and convincing is all that he wrote —however youthful and polemical—when broaching the conception of life which was to mature later and become the very basis of Fascism, a conception concrete, realistic and supremely aristocratic. Bread! By all means, give the people bread enough, good wages, a decent level of comfort, and let the privileged classes show themselves aristocrats in the true sense, the choicest spirits, and practise voluntary abnegation as a proud privilege of their caste! Prosperity and a general high level of well-being and culture should be attainable by all who merit it by steady work.

CHAPTER XXII

THE ADVOCATE OF "DIRECT ACTION"

Mussolini's Heresies—"Direct Action" in practice—Mussolini, the Mayor and the Milk—Mussolini and the Tripoli Expedition—His Alleged Misdemeanours—Five Months' Imprisonment—The Reggio Congress—Mussolini becomes Editor of the *Avanti*—Roccagorga.

NOW and again there has appeared in the *Popolo d'Italia* a notification to all the countless Fascist newspapers and periodicals to the effect that copies of them should be sent to Mussolini to his private address. His house is full of them. Now that he is at the head of the Government, as formerly when he was editing his great daily, he opens and examines every one of these journals and some of them he reads carefully.

Better than anyone else he recognizes the value of the little local forge, often humble enough—he knows how it may shape minds and animate ideals. In a decentralized land like Italy these provincial centres of public opinion count for more than in countries like England and France taking their cue largely from the Capital.

In the period with which we are now dealing it often happened that little Forli would become the seat of a heresy frowned upon by the official Socialism of Rome and Milan, and that the Anti-Pope of the *Lotta di Classe* would battle with the pontiffs consecrated by the ecumenical councils of the Party in those two cities. At the Milan congress of 1910 Mussolini, as he himself records, delivered a speech so heterodox that he was surprised that he was not stoned! He took a definite stand against Parliamentarianism in all its forms, scoffed at all the talk about the elections, and condemned the so-called *blocs* or party compacts under which the Socialists should

co-operate with other parties for the sake of winning seats in Parliament. He was all for revolution, for direct action, without compromise. At Reggio Emilia, in the Congress of 1912, he was to take a stronger line still, routing the leaders of the Party and grasping the reins in his own hands, and the control of the *Avanti* into the bargain.

At Forli itself, he was not content to preach direct action—he put it in practice. When, for instance, a public meeting was held there on one occasion to consider the question of the rise in the price of milk and the usual stereotyped speeches were being made, he introduced an entirely new element into the discussion. "The price of milk," he declared, "which is a necessary of life for the weak and the ailing, for children and for the old, must be within the means of all. It *must* be! Therefore, let's have no more talk about it! Come with me!"

And, followed by the crowd, who were hypnotized rather than convinced, he marched across the piazza, burst through the line of troops there drawn up, and, calling upon the rest to await him outside, made his way into the ancient palace of the Town Hall, accompanied by four or five others, and into the presence of the Mayor. He did not waste words upon that worthy official. What was wanted, he intimated, was an undertaking that there should be an immediate decrease in the price of milk. Failing that, the Mayor and Aldermen would find themselves thrown out of the balcony into the piazza!

Who was it who said that the ideal form of government was "*un despotismo corretto dalla defenestrazione*"?* As it happened, the Forlivesi of the fifteenth century had actually "corrected" the evil tyranny of their ruler, Manfredo degli Ordelaffi, by throwing him into that very piazza from the height—and it was a considerable height

* "Defenestration"—throwing out of the window. The word is a very old one.

—of that very balcony. The historical precedent seemed to the Mayor to outweigh accepted economic ideas as to supply and demand. He came to a prompt decision and those economic ideas were set aside *instanter*.

. . . . . .

It was in September, 1911, that the Government of Signor Giolitti organized the military expedition which disembarked at Tripoli and which proceeded to effect the occupation of Libya.

Two years earlier, Austria had thrown the first match into the proverbial powder-magazine of the Balkans. The annexation of Bosnia-Herzogovina gave the signal for further inroads on the possessions of the Sick Man, the "spoiling" of whom was to lead eventually to so terrible a cost for Europe. Bismarck was no longer alive to hold the Austrian Government in check and the German Kaiser had forgotten his warning that the whole of Eastern Europe was not worth "the bones of a single Pomeranian Grenadier." Germany had encouraged Austria in her territorial aggrandisement, and in order to maintain good relations with their ally the Central Powers had agreed to give Italy a free hand on the Libyan coast.

I remember those days well, when a few of the faithful met in the famous salon of Anna Kuliscioff in Milan. She was a great woman, with the hard brilliance and many-sidedness of a diamond. Amongst those who gathered round her were Turati and Treves. Though still beautiful in face and figure she bore the marks of Russian, French and Italian prisons and still more of the sufferings she had undergone in a Lithuanian village, where she, the eighteen-year-old daughter of rich parents, shared the squalor and the wretched food of the peasants, and sowed the seeds of the arthritis which crippled her in later years. A mystic to the depths of her Russian soul, she was yet, like most Russians, sharp and hard in driving a political bargain. She was content to influence events from behind the scenes, and though she

dominated men she was content to leave to them the show and trappings of power. Her high ideals and immense pride kept her free from petty vanity. She was destined to see the ambitions of her whole life thwarted by the mediocrity of the men through whom she worked. There was a dramatic dispute between Anna Kuliscioff, Turati and Treves (then the editor of the *Avanti*) on the night of the landing in Tripoli.

Treves, who was always ready to split hairs and always plausible, maintained that it was more than ever necessary to support Giolitti. Only Socialist support could hold Giolitti to a Liberal home policy favourable to Socialism and moderate his ambitions in Africa. If the Socialists were to abandon him there would be nothing to restrain him, and he would be driven into a colonial policy of extreme reaction. This was the way in which they reasoned in Socialist circles. Bent on vote-catching intrigues and on securing parliamentary influence, Treves beamed with enthusiasm at the thought of being able to support his beloved Giolitti.

Turati, as ever, did not of course know his own mind. The paralysis of will habitual to him, and his intellectual indolence, made him incapable of coming to any important decision, whether political or moral. He was never a politician, and had neither the intellect nor the character necessary to lead a young and revolutionary party. On this occasion he inclined to Treves's view of the case. It is always easier to support a policy than to oppose it.

But Anna Kuliscioff went off at a tangent. Delivering herself of one of her finest efforts, she pulverized poor Treves, nor did she spare Turati: "You understand nothing at all about it, Filippino!" she cried.

The next day *Avanti* came out with a magnificent article in which it was declared that the Socialist party, confronted with the Tripolitan adventure, would go over to uncompromising opposition to the Government. To give Treves his due, no one could fence more brilliantly than he could. How often the article in the morn-

ing edition called forth our admiration for the way in which he confuted his own propositions of the night before!

A very different view was taken of the matter by the young editor of Forli. He did not share those objections against every kind of war of conquest or colonization which go normally with the democratic and humanitarian philosophy of reforming Socialists. The rest of us condemned the expedition on principle as an act of violence, opposed as we were to violence in every form. We were the victims, however, of a misguided idealism. So we were to learn from experience. Woe to the people and the nation who will not be taught by this master!

A disciple of Blanqui, of Nietzsche and of Sorel, in short a *terribilista*, the heretic of Forli felt no superstitious horror of warfare in general. It was only on grounds of political strategy that he disapproved of the Libyan adventure. Events were to justify only too completely the prophetic words which he printed on the 30th of September, 1911.

"Italy," he wrote, "initiates to-day a new epoch of her history, an epoch of uncertainty, pregnant with many unknown perils. War is almost always a prelude to revolution."

As for opposing the enterprise, if there was to be any opposition at all, it should be unrestricted in its nature and revolutionary. For himself, he harboured no illusion as to what could be reckoned on from the Italian people. They were not ripe for revolution. All they could be looked to for was shouting. He put the matter to the test and the crowd that gathered to listen to him and to cry *Viva la Revoluzione!* vanished in a moment at the sight of the mounted troops sent to put down disorder. All he could do was to shout "*Vigliacchi!*"—"Cowards"—as they took to their heels.

However, with the backing of a few of the more venturesome spirits, he did eventually succeed in doing

enough to incur the disapproval of the authorities, and presently we find this long list of accusations drawn up against him :

That on September 24, 1911, at a public meeting he incited the crowd to do all they could to impede the military expedition to Tripoli, and to proceed to the piazza and offer violent resistance to the public authorities and set up barricades and wage civil war, abandoning mere protests and embarking on immediate and energetic action by means of a general strike of an insurrectionary character, thus involving the perpetration of the following misdemeanours :

(1) Resistance to the public authorities and action of violence against public officials.
(2) Violent interference with the freedom of men called under arms ; resistance to the authorities ; actions of violence against public officials.
(3) The closing by violent means of industrial businesses and factories with resultant cessation of work.
(4) The stoppage by violent means of the tramways of the Romagna, together with the upsetting of the cars and the goods carried on them and the damaging of the lines.
(5) Damaging telephone lines.
(6) Damaging the State telegraph lines by pulling down poles and breaking, and taking away of, wire.
(7) Forcing by violent means the stopping of a locomotive.
(8) Placing a telegraph pole across a railway-line with danger to an express train.

All these misdeeds were alleged to have been done at Forli during the days of September 25, 26 and 27. Not many Prime Ministers, I imagine, can lay claim to such a record !

The only charge which he repelled—and that with

vehemence—was the last. This, he felt, was a charge of inhumanity and wickedness, unworthy of a fighting man.

His reply to the accusations generally was as follows :

" The declaration of a general strike at Forli was made independently of the action set on foot by me. The proletariat of Forli have no regard for me.

" When I declare myself in favour of *sabotage*, I mean, in accordance with my theories, economic *sabotage*, which is not to be confused with barbarity.* I may approve of the cutting of the telegraph wire as a form of protest but I condemn the placing of the pole across the railway-line with a view to derailing the train, because the train which was to pass was neutral. *Sabotage*, according to me, ought to have a moral bearing.

" At the station I exerted myself to prevent the crowd from forcing its way into the telegraph office.

" I fell and was injured by a blow from a sabre. The violence offered by the crowd was caused by the aggressive attitude of the police force."

As for the public meeting of the 25th, he declared that his speech at it had been " historical, geographical and illustrative." In it he had used the words : " Between us Socialists and the Nationalists, there is this difference of view : they want a vast Italy ; what I want is an Italy well cultivated, rich and free. I should prefer to be a citizen of Denmark rather than a subject of the Chinese Emperor. I took my stand, then, on love of country. I may have been a little incoherent in my remarks, for I have been accused of having shown a weakness for nationalism. If I had wished to take a strictly internationalist and revolutionary line I should, in reflecting on the Libyan Expedition, have rejoiced after the fashion of the Christian over the decadence of the Roman Empire : ' What matters it to me that the Empire is falling into ruins, as upon these ruins will rise the Cross of Christ ? ' I should have had to go on to say : ' And

* Mussolini uses the word *Vandalismo*.

if official Italy is going to embark upon a venture which will cost her blood and treasure she will be the less able to offer resistance to the dissemination of our ideas and to the blows dealt her by the revolution.' But, because I am an Italian and love the land in which I was born and whose language I speak, therefore in my capacity as a good Italian citizen I expressed, on the basis of economic and geographical facts, my opinion that this enterprise was calculated to injure gravely the interests of the nation, with which are bound up indissolubly the interests of the proletariat. I have written and said what I have written and said because the Italy I want to see, the Italy I would love, is one which would strive to fulfil the duty which now at last is recognized : the duty of freeing her children from economic and moral impoverishment. . . .

" I deny and reject the accusations of complicity in the acts of vandalism perpetrated by the mob.

" And now I conclude.

" I conclude like that philosopher who had inscribed on the door of his house the words : ' Who enters does me a pleasure, who does not enter does me an honour.'

" In the same spirit, I say to you, Gentlemen of the Tribunal, that if you acquit me you will do me a pleasure, because you will restore me to my work and to society. But if you condemn me you will do me an honour because you find yourselves in presence not of a malefactor, but of an asserter of ideas, of an agitator for conscience' sake, of a soldier of a creed which calls for your respect in that it bears within itself the visions of the future and the great strength of the truth."

Five months' imprisonment are not enough to make a martyr of a man. Coming as they did, however, on top of so many previous periods of imprisonment, they were a not inconsiderable hardship. All the more remarkable for those who know Mussolini's insatiable love of action, was the peaceful serenity with which he always

carried himself throughout his various trials. He faced verdicts without hesitation or weakness. In the trial of two years later, in connection with the Roccagorga affair of which we shall talk presently, it was the same.

I myself was not present at that Congress at Reggio Emilia in 1912, at which gentle, amiable Leonido Bissolati, together with his sympathizers among the Socialist leaders, met defeat at the hands of the man who was thenceforth to take the leading rôle in their place. My husband, who was there, and who, having long been one of Bissolati's admiring supporters, voted with reluctance on the side of the victor, thus described to me in a letter the formidable new-comer : "a wonderful young man, spare of figure, hard, fiery, most original, with occasional bursts of eloquence ; a man with a great future before him. You will see that he is destined to dominate the Party."

I had another account of him from Anna Kuliscioff : " He is nothing of a Marxist," she declared, " nor is he really a Socialist at all. He has not the mentality of a scientific Socialist. Nor is he really a politician. He is a sentimental poetaster who has read Nietzsche."

At a later date, I came to feel that there was some truth in these words. At the time Mussolini's dramatic appearance upon the scene set me thinking rather of those legendary heroes who would make their way in rusty armour and wearing unknown devices into some great royal tournament and, in joust after joust, unhorse the proudest knights and, without ever raising their visor, accept the coveted prize of shield or coat of mail or splendid charger, and then, their identity still unguessed, spur back into the unknown like some Amadis of Gaul.

But, to tell the truth, when I first came to know him, I could discern nothing about him either of the jousting knight or of the poet. He put me in mind rather of

Savonarola, by reason of the strange fanatical glint in his eyes and by the imperious look about his nose !

. . . . . .

Claudio Treves was among the "Reformist" Socialist leaders who fell in that congress, but instead of Mussolini being installed at once in his place as editor of the *Avanti*, the post was given at first to an absurd nonentity among the "Revolutionary" Socialists, one Giovanni Bacci ; this state of things, however, could not last, and in December, 1912, Bacci was replaced by the real protagonist in the fray.

I had been until then the art critic of the journal. Belonging as I did to the Reformist section of the Party I felt called upon to resign : art, it seemed to me, would count for nothing in the programme of the Revolutionaries. The new editor, however, pressed me to remain on and to deal with other matters, leaving pictures and statues alone. Treves was no longer suffered to contribute his gracefully-written screeds. "The political articles of the newspaper which I edit," declared Mussolini, "shall be written by myself." And write them he did. Rough, downright, vigorous, slashing. There was no longer a trace in our columns of the philosophical relativism, the fencing and opportunism, of the Reformist. Behind every word one felt the man, the whole man, putting his whole soul and body into everything he said. Where Treves wrote "Perhaps," or, like Montaigne, "*Que sais-je ?*" this new leader-writer maintained "*Es muss*"—"it *shall* be." What the Party wanted, he declared, was nerve and vigour and martial ardour. It was sunk in a slough of bourgeois Freemasonry.

Between Mussolini and Freemasonry there was a feud of old standing.

Freemasonry, as embodied in the Carbonari of Mazzini's day and earlier, had produced the earliest apostles of the idea of Italian unity and its earliest martyrs ; but that stage was past and the catacombs

had changed into the conventicles of the *arrivistes*. For Mussolini's eyes Freemasonry had no longer any charms, either in its humanitarianism, equalitarian, democratic, international, fine in itself, but sunk into a fetish, or in its secret bonds of union between all its "brothers," or in its banal and vulgar anti-clericalism, or in the monstrous religious symbolism of its esoteric rites. Its pretences of secrecy above all repelled him. Anything that so much as savours of the secretive, the concealed, the surreptitious, is hateful and horrible to Mussolini.

The conflict between him and the Freemasons ended in his victory. At the Congress of Ancona he had it proclaimed that Socialists must no longer be Freemasons. Eight years later, in 1922, the same rule was enforced for Fascists.

In a very short period the circulation of the *Avanti* sprang up from 40,000 to 100,000. There was no resisting the spell of Mussolini's writing. It was not always correct, it was not polished, it was not fanciful or brilliant, but it was concise, nervous, pregnant, novel. It was "direct action" in another form. In those years, in the villages and in the market-places of Southern Italy, things were happening daily which were not painful merely but disgraceful. Southern Italy lagged behind the North. Men were still struggling there against starvation wages—striving to raise themselves above squalor and misery. But our Socialist leaders had had no care for that poor, ignorant, agricultural South, where there were no factories with workers to organize, wages to raise, parliamentary seats to win. And the Southern landowners did not know how to fight their own battles. They conceived of no other defenders than Pope, Governor, soldiers, police. It was a return to the mediæval *jacqueries* : on the one hand, ignorance, haughtiness and cupidity; on the other ignorance, exasperation, fanaticism. . . . With the madness of desperation the crowd threw themselves on the

soldiers. Shots were fired—there were cries and shouts —the whole piazza was red with blood.

In January, 1913, the editor of the *Avanti*, referring to an exceptionally violent affray of this kind, wrote in words athrill with indignation: "Is it, then, possible that in this Italy which we think of as a great paragon of all that is civilized, unarmed old men are being shot down and pregnant women and babes are being destroyed? And that when the poor of Roccagorga appeal for drains and doctors, and water and light, the Government, which has no money for such things, sends thither carabiniers and drowns the protest of the people in blood. The day will come when the mob will itself impose a check, reacting against homicidal violence, avenging, not merely metaphorically, nor with ballot papers, their dead, their massacred, and the cruel mockery of the lying Government and the conniving judiciary."

And he pursued the campaign in another vehement article:

"Assuredly, for all those who have an idyllic, Arcadian, pacifist conception of Socialism, for all those who believe in the dogma of the inviolability of human life (for us life is not the only good, it is not an end in itself but a means: Sandor Petofi sang—'*la vita mi è cara, l'amore ancor più, ma per La libertà li do entrambi!*'* He who assigns an absolute value to the life of man condemns the world to stand still)—for all those Socialists who are endowed with the time-honoured sensibility of the Christians, a cry such as ours may seem a blasphemy.

"But it is not.

"It is logical. It is socialistic. It is humane.

"The inevitability which we affirm in regard to massacres generally does not make it impossible to

*"Life is dear to me, love dearer still, but I would give them both for liberty."

proclaim the possibility and the duty of eliminating the special and national causes of these massacres which thus periodically stain with blood the towns and countryside of Italy.

" We have deplored the ' terrible blindness ' of the dominating classes who, instead of foreseeing and preventing, merely repress. And we have said that it was necessary to bring rural Italy (the thousands of Roccagorgas and Verbicaris scattered about throughout our peninsula) to more human conditions of life; that is to say, to reduce to the minimum the special causes of that which we have called the ' classical ' Italian massacre because it is dealt out to, and has always been dealt out to, unarmed crowds which rise in revolt not to overthrow Governments, but to obtain that which for more than a century has been the patrimony of all civilized countries.

". . . Therefore, we point out to the ruling classes of Italy their definite duty. At bottom, this work of ours, which seems to official eyes a work of negation merely, is really most valuable in so far as it spurs on the Government to take thought for the future. If the Government cannot do so, or does not know how to do so, so much the worse for it ! "

It is the Socialist who is speaking, indubitably, but the tones are the tones of the individual man, the patriotic Italian, wounded in his national pride.

It is pleasing to me to be able to reproduce this utterance of ten years ago, in connection with certain words pronounced quite recently by the Fascist leader. In July, 1924, he showed himself the same man, the same Italian. It will have been noted that the editor of the *Avanti* indulged in no high-sounding language about " liberty " and " oppression." Drains, doctors, water, light—these were the things, he said, which the people of Roccagorga wanted the Government to give them. What they agitated for were " more human conditions of life," not an upsetting of the Government. And he asserted boldly their right to resort to arms if necessary,

their right to kill before they themselves were killed—"*il diritto di uccidere prima di esseri uccidi.*"

In this sentence we have the gist of the Fascist theory of that form of violence which Mussolini calls "legitimate" only when it is "necessary, loyal and surgical." And in it, also, we have the gist of his programme of Government. "The people," he declared in July, 1924, "on the innumerable occasions when I have been face to face with them and have spoken with them close at hand . . . have never asked me to free them from a tyranny which they do not feel because it does not exist; they have asked me for railways, houses, drains, bridges, water, light, and roads."

And after the assassination of Matteotti, Mussolini's first utterance in an address to the Grand Council of the Fascists was one of vehement impatience with the storm which then broke out, because it prevented him from applying himself to the task of "ordinary administration"—the only task which he regarded as vital and essential, that of giving the people what they really wanted and were asking for, bridges, water, roads.

. . . . . .

It was in the Spring of 1914 that Mussolini and his associates on the *Avanti* were put on their trial for their action regarding the Roccagorga incident. I was present, my husband being the leading counsel for the accused. There were many brilliant speeches in court, but that of Mussolini was a thing apart.

He rejoiced personally that the case was to be heard in Milan, "the brain of Italy," for it was of importance that Milan should learn that the Italy which Alfredo Niceforo twenty years previously had spoken of as "*Italia barbara contemporanea*" was in existence still.

"Now, I do not feel regret," he said, "and shall never feel regret at having written those articles when the telegraph brought me news of those events. It was my desire that the unfortunate people of Roccagorga should realize that, side by side with them, unfortunate

Italians that they were, there lived other Italians who understood all their misery. And I would like the social significance of this discussion to be taken to heart alike by those in Italy who govern and by those in Italy who allow themselves to be governed."

Mussolini proceeded to appeal to the jury to acquit the manager of the *Avanti*, taking the entire responsibility for its utterances upon himself. "All the thunderbolts of the law," he exclaimed, "ought to fall upon my head." Not only was he not innocent of the crime, he was a "recidivist" and would probably commit the same crime again—in fact it would be almost a point of honour with him to do so. Moreover, he had not found prison life intolerable. There was a Russian proverb to the effect that to be a complete man one should have spent four years in a public school, one at a university, and two in prison. "And now," he said in conclusion, "I will make a suggestion which I should not submit to a bench of magistrates in their robes, for they could not be expected to be intelligent men—or, at least, intelligent enough, and unprejudiced enough, to take in the truth and full beauty of affirmations which may seem paradoxical. I will say to you that you ought to acquit us, not because we have not committed the offence, but because we *have* committed it, and because we promise to commit it again! Imagine an Italy in which thirty-six millions of citizens should all think in the same way as though their brains were all cast in the same shape! Why, you would have a madhouse or rather a realm of utter boredom and imbecility. The King himself, faced by thirty-six millions of monarchists, would feel the need of insisting on the existence of a Republican, just as the dogs of Acqisgrana, according to Heinrich Heine, prayed for the footprint of the foreigner that might bring a note of change into the monotony of their lives. It is necessary that side by side with those who cry 'No! No!' there should be those who cry 'Yes! Yes!'—side by side with those

who exalt the army, those who decry it—side by side with those who acclaim our bourgeois society, those who would fain demolish it.

"What we stand in need of are dissensions, clashes of view, strife. Unanimity, uniformity, spell brainlessness and death. Gentlemen of the jury, render homage to the ancient philosopher, Heraclitus, who declared: 'Strife is the origin of all things.' Well, then, allow us to go on with our strife, give us freedom for this, and you will render homage to a great philosopher and to a very great principle—the principle of Freedom!"

CHAPTER XXIII

MUSSOLINI, THE "AVANTI" AND THE "UTOPIA"

A Mussolini maxim: A Hierarchy* must culminate in a Pin-Point—On Parliamentarianism—Mussolini's tragic bent—The Founding of *Utopia*.

IN Milan, while editing the *Avanti* during the pre-war period, Mussolini lived the isolated life customary to him at all stages of his career. The ordinary Socialist gatherings with their futile chatter had, naturally, little attraction for him; and he has never believed in making too many acquaintances. What was the good of burdening oneself with purposeless social ties which inevitably must be loosened when he should attain the heights whose atmosphere he already breathed in anticipation—heights upon which there is no such thing as equality? "*Pari, no! mai!*" Mussolini declares to-day: "*Pari nessuno con chi rappresenta il governo dello stato*"—"Equal, no! Never! With him who represents the Government of the State no one may claim equality."

This is a principle on which Mussolini takes his stand absolutely. If, on occasions when King Victor is being greeted by the public, some individual in the crowd directs his acclamation towards the Prime Minister personally rather than towards his Sovereign, those large, dark eyes glare angrily in disapproval. On the other hand, when the Confederation of Labour, at its Congress of 1923, debated the question of "collaboration" with the Government, Mussolini was quick to intimate that he would gladly welcome any kind of collaboration, whether from individual "experts," or from groups and

* The word *Gerarchia*, here rendered "Hierarchy," might be translated "Organization," but as Mussolini's use of it is somewhat rhetorical "Hierarchy" seems more suitable.

associations, but that he could treat with them only as his technical advisers and consultants and only in a subordinate position. There could be no question of his inviting them into " deliberate collaboration " on a footing of equality. Supreme authority, he holds, rests with the State always and in everything. " A Hierarchy must culminate in a pin-point "—is a maxim of his ; by which he means that the men at the top must be at the very top—they must have a free hand: whether in a State or in an Army it is impossible without confusion and disorder to have two authorities on the same footing.

How great an innovation was involved by the taking up of such an attitude can be gauged by those who know to what a low standing the Italian State had fallen latterly and who are familiar with the story of Signor Giolitti's methods when in power. To us young Reformists, dissatisfied with our leaders, what seemed urgent was to secure the entry of new men of a better type into political life, men representative of the new classes and of unblemished repute, not men of genius but serious students of the problems of the day. Mussolini, more far-seeing, knew better how to prepare for the future, husbanding his resources and keeping himself and his associates untouched by corrupting influences. You do not freshen overripe pears by putting fresh pears among them. What happens is that the fresh pears go rotten. And you do not pour new wine into old bottles. The line of least resistance was not Mussolini's way. He had no belief in methods called conciliatory but in effect demoralizing. " Break, but do not bend," was his motto.

In 1913, Signor Turati sang dithyrambs over the granting of universal suffrage and reproached Mussolini with his lack of enthusiasm over it. " We do not make much of it in the *Avanti*," he replied, " because we are restrained from doing so by shame. Had universal suffrage been won by us we should have good reason to exalt it and ourselves. But it has been bestowed upon

us, and only poor wretches of beggars utter hymns over charities obtained from their masters."

For the rest the granting of universal suffrage left him on the whole indifferent or hostile. An anti-Parliamentarian by nature, he has expressed himself on the subject of Parliament with hatred and disgust—I had almost said with rancour. Apropos of Parliamentarianism he himself wrote in the *Lotta di Classe* :

"We prefer quality to quantity. We prefer to the obedient and uncomplaining flock who follow the shepherd but break away at the first cry of 'Wolf,' the small and resolute and courageous nucleus who have found a reason for their faith, who know what they want and who advance straight to the goal."

Success in the elections was, of course, all to the good, but it was only a means to an end. It was above all with a view to propagating their ideas that he and his associates entered into the electoral contests. It was not through parliamentary successes that the great battle would eventually be won but in the market-place and nowhere else !—*in piazza e non altrove !*

. . . . . .

The "slackness" which characterized the pre-war life of Italy was repugnant to Mussolini's mind, with its bent towards things great and grand. Probably he scented the coming tragedy and was beginning unconsciously to make ready for it with that *amor fati* which is characteristic of lofty natures. Public life to him was a thing serious and tremendous, not a farce or a comic opera. Strenuous are the demands of the proletariat, and strenuous must be the ruling classes in replying, in defending the State and above all in commanding. Only by determined action on both sides, carried to the point of conflict, can the masses and the classes be educated. Italians in spite of violent partisanship tend to scepticism and to a kind of superficial toleration against which Mussolini revolted.

"In short," he said, "we want to force the Socialists

to be Socialists, and the *bourgeois* to be *bourgeois*. This is not the paradox it seems. We do not wish to tone down but to deepen the antagonism between the two. This antagonism is beneficent. It keeps us continually upon a war-footing. It forces us to keep a watch over ourselves, to improve and to control ourselves ; the *bourgeoisie*, as the result of our pressure upon it, will have to overcome its sloth and inertness and to get new life into itself in order to sustain our attack, or else it will perish. Don't rub off the angles, therefore, don't temper the antitheses. From the clash of two stones there issues a spark ; out of the forces in opposition will take shape the better forms of the social equilibrium."

Although his speech was direct and unrhetorical it was with prophetic instinct that he went on to talk of " the blood-bath necessary for the Italian proletariat," to rouse it from its degeneracy.

To the careful observer, Mussolini's standpoint was then what it is still ; his was already a tragic bent. The only change is that, whereas he was then attacking the State, he has now captured the position, so that he can devote his powers to the objects which he was formerly opposing. It is of no consequence that among the attacking party of to-day there are some of his former companions in arms. They are irreconcilably destructive by nature, either anarchists or malcontents to whom all discipline is intolerable.

His own attitude is the same whether in attack or defence : " fight hard and to the bitter end."

He who speaks out loud and stong in tones that ring unmistakably of sincerity is bound always to find listeners—and often followers. Mussolini's fervid and fierce idealism sent the circulation of the *Avanti* up by leaps and bounds. Presently he indulged himself in the luxury of founding, side by side with the great daily, a little weekly review, at once serious and lively, for the title of which he went to Sir Thomas More—*Utopia :* he created it, he explained, *per sentissi maggioramenti se*

stesso—as we may say, to abound the more in his own self.

To those who brought him the modest 10 lire which were to cover the annual subscription and who asked for a receipt he would reply a trifle roughly : " What's all this fuss about a receipt ? I haven't got any receipt forms ! This paper is all in my head. I'm doing the whole of it and there's not going to be any bureaucracy about the way it's done ! "

Nor would he condescend to any preliminary announcement as to the " illustrious personages " to be included among his contributors, as is the custom with new journalistic ventures. The paper would speak for itself.

And if, as a matter of fact, there were not to be very many famous contributors, he saw to it that the articles were marked by variety and originality and written with zest and with thought. It was a stimulus to all of us who worked on it to know that our most attentive reader was the editor himself.

In one of the earliest issues, the aims and nature of the little journal were thus set forth by Mussolini under the heading, " The Desperate Adventure " :

" Here I am able to talk in the first person singular. Elsewhere I stand for the collective view of a Party—a view which may be, and almost always is, my view also. Here I stand for my own personal view, my *Weltanschauung*, and I do not trouble myself whether it agrees or not with the average view of the Party. . . .

" Is it the case that Socialism is, from the standpoint of the ideologist, a thing outworn ? Is it the case that Socialism cannot lead to any new truth ? . . . Is it possible to give back a soul to this body ? A will to this mass ? A new meaning to this dim faith ? I have replied ' Yes ' to these questions. But I have never cherished the vain illusion of being equal, alone and unaided, to such an enterprise, which, if not a desperate one, is certainly arduous. And therefore, I have

decided, at my own risk and peril, to offer to Italian Socialists—to those who study, and who think—the means of studying Socialism and thinking it out afresh. . . ."

Proceeding, Mussolini set out to analyse and reflect upon the whole theory of Socialism in general and the teachings of Marx in particular. It was a remarkable essay, well worthy of the attention of all students of European history, and—what is particularly interesting—it might almost be reprinted without a word altered in the *Gerarchia* of yesterday. Mussolini has changed the name of his organ, but in temperament, convictions, methods, ideas, he has remained the same. The Fascism of to-day is merely the realization of the Revolutionary Socialism of that period. It is for this that the people, who often can see through the masks of words, love him and follow him, while the worst part of *bourgeoisie*, parasites as they are of commercialism and finance, are deceived by mere names and semblances. They observe to-day a new order of things and draw back.

CHAPTER XXIV

THE "RED WEEK" AND AFTER

A Revolution which failed—The *Avanti* calls for a Truce—The Coming of the Great War—Mussolini's "Order of the Day"—The Two Kinds of Neutrality—Mussolini's Change of Mind.

THE great tragedy which Mussolini had foreseen broke out in August, 1914.

In Italy it was preceded by a brief prologue—a little tragi-comedy it was to seem in the light of later events, although at the time it was accompanied by affrays which were violent and sanguinary enough.

Revolutions run two great risks from the start, independently of those to be faced later: the risk of succeeding so completely that opponents deny, and even friends question, there having been any revolution at all. This happened to Mussolini in 1922. The other risk, graver because irremediable, is that of failure. The "Red Week" of 7-14 June, 1914, ended in failure.

A revolution which fails becomes ridiculous. In Milan, in Turin, in Bologna, and in all the other great Italian cities—except to some extent in Florence and Rome—the affair was restricted to a general strike, which was kept up a long time and with much excitement. But in what may be called the revolutionary region of Italy—Ancona, Rimini, Forli, Ravenna, and their provinces—improvised Committees of Action took the reins of power, held up the small garrisons in their barracks, sacked a few dairy-farms, stole a few hens and burnt the doors of a few churches. In one place a General was taken prisoner, conducted through the principal thoroughfares in an automobile, and placed in custody

in an inn " pending further orders " ; a few hours later, when it was found that the Republic had not been proclaimed either in Rome or in Milan, he was set at liberty again. A laundress had been launching insults at him through the spy-hole of the hall-door but that had been the full extent of his sufferings.

The editor of the *Avanti* called for a truce. He did so, not in the guise of a penitent. Far from it. He asserted boldly then, as he had asserted in advance, that a general strike did not seem to him, and had never seemed to him, calculated to attain the objects immediately in view. It was merely a manœuvre more likely to have moral and spiritual effects than to achieve anything tangible ; it would keep alive the revolutionary spirit and habituate people to danger, make them realize what danger was and make them welcome it. He derided that tame type of Socialism which was disposed to dispense with any revolutionary uprising for fear of failure.

These assertions, which might have sounded odious in the mouth of anyone else, took on the aspect of gravy propositions, to be considered seriously—whether thee should turn out to be true or false—by reason of the courage and the consistency of the men who gave them out. Mussolini practised what he preached. When he exclaimed : " Citizens of Milan ! Occupy the market-places ! Socialists ! To the Piazza del Duomo ! " he himself led the way. He was the first to arrive and the last to go. Heedless of cavalry charges, he was to be seen in the most conspicuous place, erect, motionless, his arms folded, hurling forth his invectives with eyes ablaze. Until his time our Socialist leaders had been men of the desk and the study, in dread of tumults ; they only faced them in committees from a sense of duty when they were not to be escaped from. They disapproved instinctively, no less than on principle, of everything in the nature of agitation. This new man, Mussolini, showed himself a soldier, a fighting man. *Io sono un Capo che precede*—I am a leader who takes the

lead !—he was to proclaim later on a memorable occasion.

While this comparatively harmless operetta was being performed in Italy, there occurred at Serajevo the act of violence which was to plunge the world into war. And then—how swiftly !—the ultimatum !

In Rome there was nothing but bewilderment. No one had foreseen the danger ahead—no one save perhaps Ferdinando Martini, statesman and man of letters, a keen-eyed Tuscan, and Baron di San Giuliano, the Sicilian, member of a famous old family of diplomatists. In Milan, also, many of us were bewildered. To orthodox Socialists, in particular, the idea of a new great war in Europe was unthinkable. I remember with what feelings of quiet confidence we had watched even the sensational incident of Agadir, although that had brought us within an ace of a conflagration. Our credulous placidity had not even been shaken in 1912 when Germany imposed immense new taxes to cover her military preparations and without evoking a murmur from her great industrialists—indeed, they paid down their money with enthusiasm. So open and definite was the threat that the eyes of all the rest of Europe must have been blinded not to see it.

Mussolini, who, unlike the rest of the world, was not taken unawares, struck a note of resolution from the start. Italy should take no part in the war. *Abbasso la guerra !*—" Down with the War !—was the title of the article in which as early as July 26th he proclaimed his views. Absolute neutrality, he declared, was the only possible attitude for Italy unless she wished to plunge to her doom. There could be no question for a single moment of going into the war on the side of Austria. Man of action that he was, and has always been, he did not content himself with writing. He called together members of all kinds of societies and groups representative of the energies and resources of the nation, and at specially summoned meetings held with closed

doors he succeeded in carrying strangely-worded resolutions threatening a general strike if the Government showed any disposition to bargain with our treacherous allies—a strike which should be seconded by all the means at the hands of the Socialist Party.

"This is the Order of the Day of the Proletariat and of the Socialist Party," he declared in that article in the *Avanti* for July 27th. "If the Government, despising the unanimous warning of public opinion, throws itself into new adventures, the 'truce of arms' proclaimed by us after the 'Red Week' shall be at an end and we shall renew 'our war' with increased audacity. Further, to co-operate with a view to circumscribing the war, seeing that it is now impossible to prevent it, is a duty of the highest importance which should be, and must be, undertaken by Italy, but it must not attempt more. . . . The members of the Proletariat are now on the alert. *The moment Italy showed inclination to break neutrality in order to back up the Central Powers the Italian Proletariat would have but the one duty —we say it out clearly and distinctly—that of rising in rebellion!*"

And he coined the phrase which was to make impossible all complicity of any kind with Austria: "Our neutrality must be absolute! *Nè compari, nè manutengoli dell' Austria nè della Germania*—"Neither friends nor accomplices of Austria nor of Germany!"

A weighty and incisive speech was made by Signor Ferdinando Martini at a meeting of the Council of Ministers two or three days later in which he put forward the same view, supporting it not merely by arguments based upon legal and diplomatic reflections and considerations of foreign policy, but also on the ground that it was demanded by the feelings of the people as expressed by their most powerful organ, the *Avanti*.

The Government, thus influenced, proceeded to proclaim Italy's neutrality, and, having done so, the Ministers, feeling that there was nothing left to do,

turned their thoughts with relief to the subject of their summer holidays.

The notion that Italy's neutrality should be an armed neutrality of a kind calculated to enforce respect and to guarantee security never entered their heads. It sounds incredible, but it is the truth, vouched for by witnesses whose authority cannot be impeached, that it was only about the 7th of September that Italy's military unpreparedness was taken into serious consideration by the San Giuliano Ministry congregated at Fiuggi and preoccupied with curing themselves of their sedentary complaints. Signor Martini it was who brought home to them the perils of the situation. Did the shade of the great Messer Niccolo gaze down upon them sardonically, reflecting upon those admonishments given forth to deaf ears centuries earlier—those warnings of what came of a neutrality unarmed and impotent?

It was on August 1st that the Belgian Socialist Party—Anseele, the revolutionary, agreeing with Vandervelde, the reformist—were impelled to make public proclamation of the "indestructible solidarity" of the country and the right of conscientious Socialists to take up arms in defence of Belgian soil. Franck, the Socialist member of the Reichstag, died in the assault on Luneville and by way of testament his last utterance was of pride at having given his life "under arms for the greatness of Germany." The French Socialists were all fighting.

The *Avanti*, face to face with the "sudden and unjustifiable aggression of Germany" and her "unheard-of and lawless procedure," welcomed and applauded the decision of the Belgian Socialists to take up arms against the "mad and criminal" exhibition of Prussian and Pan-German militarism. To do so was but to act like the private citizen who arms himself with a Browning revolver to defend himself against the attack of robbers. As to Italy, it declared: "Let us envisage some simple hypotheses. First, the German *bloc* loses the game and

then Italy has nothing to fear. Secondly, the German *bloc* wins all along the line against France, against Russia, against Serbia. Now, if neutrality in Italy be justified, as we believe, and if, nevertheless, Austria, inebriated by her victories, should give signs (the hypothesis is an unlikely one) of perpetrating a 'punitive expedition' against Venice, then—it is probable that many of those who to-day are accused of anti-patriotism would know how to do their duty.

"This eventuality, however improbable, must be taken into serious consideration. The first victims of the invasion of a foreign army are not the townsmen, who, when the country has been set aflame, have many facilities for flight. The hardships of an invasion which is not withstood fall upon the inhabitants of the country districts. This explains the attitude of the Belgian and French Socialists. A victorious invasion may have other consequences : it may bring about a change—more or less favourable—of social conditions in which the working classes should pursue their class war. We maintain that this danger of reprisals on the part of the Central Powers, should they be victorious, does not exist.

"What conclusion is to be drawn? One only. Italy must remain neutral. We Socialists, determined opponents of the War, because it constitutes the strongest proof of the co-operation of the classes and the extreme form of the spoliation of the proletariat, we Socialists are for neutrality. This neutral position of ours which is in accordance with our principles, finds also its profound justification in the realities of the present condition of things."

War and Socialism were in his eyes things "antithetical and irreconcilable." It was all-important, he declared, not to evoke "a state of mind" which was "full of danger"—to look realities in the face and not to cherish "illusions."

The "state of mind" against which he declaimed was to prove to be his own. Those "illusions" were

to gather strength in his mind daily. He was soon to be for intervention and against neutrality.

His state of mind was in truth a complex one. It was not the Socialist in him that was for neutrality and the Italian in him for war. Rather it was the contrary. The internationalist would have been ready to plunge into the vortex with a view to bringing the war to a speedy end, thus saving many lives and ending in the re-establishment of those principles of right and justice which had been so wickedly trampled upon. But the patriot hesitated.

And the problem even became identified with the very essence of the War—its aims and its probable outcome.

In contradiction to the *Idea Nazionale*, the organ of the Nationalists, which clamoured for Italy's entry into the war on the side of the Central Powers and which urged that only thus could the country serve its own interests and achieve its own aggrandisement, Mussolini scouted all such aspirations towards material greatness. Spiritual greatness, he insisted, was the essential thing. . . .

One evening in September the Socialist Party in Milan decided to hold a conference to consider the great problem: Was it to be absolute neutrality or relative neutrality? Three representatives of each school of thought were to defend the alternative policies. As was natural, Mussolini was chosen as the principal supporter of absolute neutrality—the policy which he had advocated until then. What a dramatic figure he cut as he stood before us revealing his mind in all its nakedness! What a contrast between his fiery frenzied utterance and manifest anguish of mind upon this occasion and the calmness and serenity that had marked his bearing when I had seen him in police courts confronting sentences of imprisonment! What was now at issue was not his personal comfort but a problem of conscience weighted with the whole future of the country.

He was seized with mistrust of himself, afraid of his own inability to resist the fascination, inability to keep his mind cool and well-balanced, and to judge the pros and cons for Italy—for *Italy*, not for international Socialism. He did, indeed, use these words : "In considering this question we must remember that we are Socialists," but this was a phrase used manifestly to satisfy his conscience ; the truth of the matter came out immediately in the main proposition : "and from the national point of view, remembering that we are Italians." When he had finished speaking, the Reformist speaker who was to have opposed him displayed a certain embarrassment and all he could say was that he could not disagree with him.

From this moment Mussolini declared that he might be in favour of war if the Western nations were in serious danger.

"It would be absurd," he said, "to judge all wars alike. If it is a question of war on Austria-Hungary, the Socialist party will not oppose it. Neutrality to the East is one thing, to the West another. The point at issue is to complete Italian unity."

He declared it was not for Socialists to take the initiative. In principle they were against "War." As to the policy of the *Avanti* and the Party, it had several objectives :

(1) It seeks to keep the proletariat free from the influences of ideas foreign to its conscience and to its class interest.

(2) It aims at neutralizing the bellicose tendencies which would fain precipitate events, in obedience to individual impulses. After the hard experience of Libya, this "Socialist counterpoise" is perhaps Providential. Presently it will be found to have been —patriotic.

(3) It shows the Government the state of public opinion so that they may take note of it in their reckonings and deliberations.

(4) It will persist in its agitation in the event, not yet impossible, of an Italian intervention in favour of the Austro-German *bloc*.

The Revolutionary's sense of reality did not permit him, although he was not responsible for the Government, to ignore the actual state of Italy's military preparations, from the patriotic standpoint—the same standpoint, essentially, which he had adopted when opposing the Libyan war. He had admitted then explicitly what I had felt so clearly and with such deep amazement on that evening of September the 9th : that he was taking his stand on the ground of the interests of the nation from the moment he foresaw, and acquiesced in, the possibility of a general mobilization of the army. Later, still in the name of the party, he gave his tacit approval to the calling up of the classes which should safeguard Italian neutrality from possible reprisals from a victorious Austria-Hungary.

" We then made the first important concession to the realities of national history," he declared. " We felt that it would have been absurd to urge that Italy alone should remain unarmed while the whole of Europe was a forest of bayonets. . . . We admitted that we must keep in readiness to defend ourselves from possible Austro-Hungarian reprisals. This admission may lead us far ; it may lead us, that is, to see that we must offer practical resistance to that war which would free us for ever from all possible future reprisals.

" Absolute neutrality can be supported only with the arguments of absolutism. It shuts its eyes to the different and multiform realities of life and history and in its ivory tower it holds itself aloof from the supreme principles. It has, however, to confront two extremely serious dangers : the threat on the one hand to ' bottle up ' the party, depriving it of all possibility and all freedom of movement in the future. To mortgage the future . . . uncertain, obscure, not to be foreseen, is an extreme risk for a party which wants to combat and not

merely to dream in comfort. On the other hand, to prevent a war, it is necessary to overthrow the State by means of a revolution. When? Certainly not on the eve of mobilization, but rather when the danger of a war is first descried on the horizon. In Italy the right moment would seem to be now. Are we willing to embark on this enormous adventure to prevent a war?"

It is necessary to mark attentively the logical sequence of ideas developed in this last—resolutely worded—article in the *Avanti* for October 10th, 1914. Its title, "*Dalla neutralità assoluta alla neutralità attiva e operante*," indicates sufficiently the spirit of it; with it ended the long mental crisis which had kept the future statesman in a condition of perplexity, not only owing to the necessity for casting aside the trappings of dogmas and of immortal principles. No, those who see only this aspect of him do not understand his real nature—the man he really is at heart. *A priori* tenets never had sufficient hold on him to stand in the way of a living contact with realities.

Genuine Italian that he was, full-blooded and racy of the soil, Mussolini had declared himself clearly so far back as August the 5th when the Prussian avalanche was sweeping down on Paris. In the columns of the *Avanti* he had made to the inherited instincts of the race the same appeal which had been issued in 1870 by the Socialist Blanqui: "*La Patria è in pericolo!* The Germans have passed the Rhine and once again are threatening civilization. . . . Oh, we the great Mediterranean race, the race of fine, delicate forms, the ideal of our species, we who have made to grow and blossom and triumph all great thoughts, all generous aspirations:

IN PIEDI PER IL COMBATTIMENTO FINALE!"*

No, on the solid ground of race and nation which he had chosen by instinct, his difficulties arose. In *Utopia*

* "To your feet for the last fight!"

he published an article by Mario Missiroli deprecating the triumph of France and England and their Slav allies as a danger to Italy. The future of the Adriatic, of the Mediterranean was threatened—or again, What danger might come from the great colonial Empires?

On October 10th, Mussolini wrote:

"Do you believe that the State of to-morrow, Republican or Socialist-Republican, will not make war if historic necessities—internal or external—make it necessary? *And who will guarantee you that the Government resulting from the revolution will not have to seek precisely in a war its own baptism*? And shall you be against a war which should safeguard your revolution, our revolution? To refuse to distinguish between war and war, and to presume to offer the same kind of opposition to all wars is to give proof of a stupidity bordering upon the imbecile."

The Red Army of the Soviets is there to justify the prediction.

He concluded: "Actual events move forward with accelerated rhythm. We have had the singular privilege of living in the most tragic hour in the history of the world. Do you want to be—as men and as Socialists—inert spectators of this tremendous drama? Or do you not want to be, in some fashion or other, its protagonists? Socialists of Italy, listen: it has happened at times that the letter has killed the spirit. Do not let us keep the letter of the Party if that means killing the spirit of Socialism!"

CHAPTER XXV

THE BREAK AWAY

Mussolini gives up the *Avanti*—The Socialist Meeting at Bologna—Slanderous Rumours—The *Popolo d' Italia* and its Modest Offices—The Final Break with the Party.

"I HEREBY resign irrevocably control of *Avanti*. Free at last. Greetings.—Mussolini."

I happened to be at a municipal sitting in Milan when the Mayor, a Syndicalist-Socialist, received and opened the telegram containing this characteristically abrupt message.

The Mayor was visibly put out. "*Benedetti' uomo, mi dispiace!*" he exclaimed. Certainly our *enfant terrible* of a Chief was putting his leading associates in an awkward fix. He had been the one to guide the Party, and those masses of the people who regarded him with feelings of fanatical adoration, towards the position of "absolute neutrality," on the ground of absolute aversion from war; and now, instead of gradually winning his own public over to the new view to which he himself had been converted, addressing them from his own pulpit from which he could be driven by no one and by nothing short of a new Congress specially called for the purpose by the National Convocation—behold! he had suddenly divested himself of all kind of authority whatever.

He had acted so hastily that friends and foes alike were startled. The only person whom I heard commend his move was Signora Anna Kuliscioff. "It is only by such decisive and instantaneous actions," she declared, "that you can get at the heart of the great public. Wise, well-considered, cautious movements are of no avail."

In any case cautious movements were not for Mussolini. He is not the man for gradual operations, planned out far ahead. What he wants, he wants at once. At the meeting of the leaders of the Party at Bologna he had brought forward an order of the day which, while affirming opposition on principle to the war, went on to maintain that the formula of "absolute neutrality" had become too dogmatic in face of an international situation growing continually more complex and bristling with unknown factors. He urged that it would be wiser for the Party not to commit itself until they could tell more clearly how events were likely to shape.

His Socialist colleagues refusing to go with him in this matter, he declared that he was freed from his "Shirt of Nessus." "We Socialists," he went on, "have never studied the problems of the Nation. The International has never occupied itself with them. Now the International has been laid in ruins by events. It will come to life again, I predict, but now it is dead. . . . It is certain that in the evolution of mankind the nation represents a phase which we have not yet passed. National sentiment is a thing which exists and cannot be denied. Therefore it is a Socialist problem and a human problem. Our intervention may be able to cut short the war, thus saving a great number of victims. To save hundreds of thousands of proletariat lives in France, Germany, Austria, would be moreover a supreme proof of international solidarity."

On the day after his sudden and unlooked-for break with the *Avanti*, to which he had bidden farewell "with serenity, with pride, and with unaltered faith," and from which he had not wished to take with him a penny even of the salary actually due to him, the governing body of the Socialist Party chivalrously offered him a small portion at all events of the sum to which he was entitled. They urged him to accept at least a thousand lire to cover the immediate needs of his family.

He refused.

Strange rumours were set afloat during the agitated days which followed. The ex-editor of the *Avanti* was declared to have accepted money from France in order to start a paper of his own.

Such reports disturbed his friends and sympathisers. We knew him, of course, to be incapable of taking a sou for himself ; but a man a-fire with a great project and with the sense of an imperative call to fulfil it !—who could say but that in a moment of excitement he might feel justified in availing himself of any means to his hand for the purpose ? It was decided to acquaint him with what was being said, for the slanders were calculated to damage seriously both Mussolini himself and the cause dear to us all. What was my surprise when I saw the two tiny rooms furnished with only four tumble-down chairs and a rickety table, in which the excellent Alessandro Giuliani, who for many years had been news-gossip on the *Avanti* and who had resigned with Mussolini, was waiting for the return of his Chief. Giuliani was pleased by my coming and honoured me at once with his confidence by showing me a type-written agreement embodying a contract for some advertisements—the only economic preparation that had yet been made for the issuing of the new paper. The contract for these advertisements and a sum of 4,000 lire obtained on a bill of exchange : such was the " Capital " available ! Quite enough, Mussolini felt. There were only the two *fattorini* to be paid at once and the printer and the paper-merchant. As for the literary staff, those who were not animated by the fires of enthusiasm could stay at home !

And so the new journal came into existence !

" *Audacia !* " was the heading Mussolini gave to the first leading article in it. To either side of the proud name of the paper, *Il Popolo d' Italia*, stood two mottoes : *Chi ha del ferro ha del pane*, Blanqui, and *La rivoluzione è un' idea che ha trovato delle baionette*, Napoleon.*

* The mottoes mean, respectively : He who has a sword has bread ; Revolution is an idea that has found bayonets to support it.

Here are the editor's first words :

" On the morrow of the famous œcumenical meeting at Bologna, at which—to use a somewhat solemn phrase —I was ' burnt,'* but not refuted, I put before myself the question which I am answering to-day by the creation of this journal of ideas and of strife. I asked myself : ' Ought I to speak or to keep silent ? Should I do well to retire to my tent like a wearied and disappointed soldier, or is it not, rather, my duty to take up again, armed with a different weapon, my post as combatant ? ' . . . Convinced as I am that time will prove me to have been right, and that the proud dogma of absolute neutrality will crumble to pieces like many other not less venerable dogmas of Churches and of all the Parties—buoyed up by this certainty which I had within me, I was able to wait with a quiet conscience."

Answering the accusations brought against him of apostasy and desertion, Mussolini declared that the future would show who really were the apostates and the deserters.

" If to-morrow there shall be a little more freedom in Europe," he went on, " and an atmosphere better fitted for the development of the abilities of the proletariat classes, the deserters and the apostates will seem rather to have been those who at the moment when action was called for held themselves indolently aloof.

" Do we wish to drag out a miserable existence under present conditions, content with this *status quo* of the monarchy and the *bourgeoisie*, or do we wish instead to break to pieces that wretched combination of intrigues and cowardice ? May it not be that this is our hour ? Instead of making ready to put up with the events impending, is it not better to try to dominate them ? The duty of Revolutionary Socialists—may it not be to wake the sleeping consciences of the multitudes and to throw some shovelfuls of quick-lime into the faces of those dead—and there are many in Italy—who persist

* *Bruciato* in the Italian.

in the illusion that they are alive? May it not be to cry: 'We are for war!' May it not be—in the present condition of things—much more revolutionary than to cry '*abbasso!*'*

"These disturbing questions, to which I for one have given my answer, explain the origin and the scope of the journal. I shall produce a journal which will be independent, liberal in the extreme, personal. My own! For it I shall be answerable to my own conscience and to no one else. I have no aggressive intentions towards the Socialist Party or against the organs of the Party in which I purpose to remain. But I am disposed to fight against anyone who may try to prevent me from criticizing freely an attitude which for various reasons I regard as fatal to the national and international interests of the proletariat.

"And, resuming the march—after a halt which has been brief—it is to you young men of Italy; young men of the offices and of the schools, young in years and young in spirit, young men of the generation whose fate it has been already to have begun to make history—it is to you that I address my inaugural appeal.

"This appeal, this cry, is a word that I would never have uttered in normal times, but which I give out to-day clearly and vigorously, without reservations, and with full confidence: that one fearful and fascinating word—WAR!"

. . . . . .

I was not present at the subsequent great meeting of the Socialist Party at which the former idol was condemned and reviled. Those who witnessed the scene declare that they recall with a thrill the sight of Mussolini's pallid face and formidable figure as he stood at bay, the target for yells, hisses and imprecations. "*Traditore! Venduto! Sicario!*"—"Traitor! Hireling! Assassin!"—were among the names hurled at him every time he attempted to speak. For long it was impossible for him

* Literally "Down with!"

to make himself heard. At last, when the tumult of angry voices began to subside, he succeeded in launching some detached phrases. "I am and will remain a Socialist! . . . It is not possible to transform one's mind. . . . Socialism is part of my flesh." . . . Finally, in a brief moment of stillness, he gave forth these words in tones not of one defeated but of a victor of the morrow —"*Voi mi odiate perchè ancora mi amate!*"*

* "You hate me because you still love me!"

CHAPTER XXVI

INTERVENTION

The *Popolo d' Italia* and its Innovations—The *Corriere della Sera*—Filippo Corridoni—The Campaign for Intervention—Prince Bülow's Offer—Giolitti's Attitude—D'Annunzio enters the Fray—Triumph.

"Abbasso l'Austria
E la Germania
Con la Turchia
In compagnia!"

TROOPS of young men, arms linked, giving forth these words resonantly, unceasingly, in a rhythmical chant, like a marching song—why was it that the effect was so impressive, so moving, unlike that of any other popular demonstration I had ever witnessed before?

And by what instinct came it that the young demonstrators maintained from the very first a discipline so martial and austere?

It was, in truth, the marching song of *l'interventismo*, the movement in favour of intervention. The procession had started out from the great *Galleria* of Milan and soon the refrain was to be heard in every section of the city. The youths were not all of the bourgeois classes. The broad-shouldered manual labourer, wearing his loose cravat and turned-down collar, was to be noted side by side with the short-sighted clerk and the athletic student from the University. Young they all were, however, young in years and young at heart, these striplings to whose idealism Mussolini had made his appeal. They were the youths who so soon in the trenches were to give their blood to ripen the revolutionary harvest of the morrow.

. . . . . .

What a devil-may-care, extravagant, mad, magnificent journal Mussolini made of the *Popolo d' Italia !* It was a living thing worthy of its creator, and he loved it. How often, in the heart of the night, I saw him return to the office to add a phrase to an article or to improve a headline. The name of the paper in itself had been an inspiration. The title, *Avanti !* had been merely an imitation of the German *Vorwärts*, with a note of exclamation added to it. Instead of this self-assertive cry of the pariah, we had a proclamation of the majesty of the people —a name reminiscent of the great *Senatus Populusque Romanus*. It was a return to Mazzini from Karl Marx.

Until then the ideal of a great Italian newspaper had been the grave *Corriere della Sera*, as a news-sheet unsurpassably rich and well-edited and complete, but notable for its equally complete lack of the personal element and of individuality, as well as of the spirit of combativeness. The *Corriere* plumed itself on its anonymity : the pawns upon its chess-board could be shifted about at will. It was, indeed, as much a machine as is a standard motor-car. Its brilliantly capable founder, Eugenio Torelli Viollier, had laid it down as a principle that it was necessary to move forward " with feet of lead " ; a popular parody called it the paper *il giornale delle pantoffole*.* In the course of its existence it had passed from one proprietor to another but despite all the changes in the times it had retained its original character. I would describe this character as being *à la Flaubert*. It was a journal conceived in the abstract like Flaubert's " Madame Bovary." The editor was everywhere in it and yet nowhere ; the creator permeated his creation.

The other Italian dailies sought to rival this important and authoritative, but grey-hued and often heavy, abstraction of a newspaper, but naturally without much success. They could not attain to its high level in the matter of varied and accurate news or to the objectivity with which it knew how to deal with the questions of the day.

* " The Journal of the Slippers."

Mussolini's new venture was, of course, as different as ever it could be, and the grave and reverend members of the *Corriere* editorial staff shook their heads in horror over his typographical heterodoxies—his unconventional and extravagant headlines, sometimes in enormous lettering which stretched right across the page. In the *Popolo d' Italia* there were no long, sober-sided, anonymous leading articles, but only short emphatic, downright, imperious deliverances with wide blank spaces between them, Mussolini's own name signed below—a very battle-cry in itself.

By his writings in the *Popolo d' Italia* and by his speeches Mussolini worked directly upon the minds of the cultured and the intellectual. Indirectly he got at the uneducated masses through Filippo Corridoni, editor of a little paper called *Battaglie Sindacali*. This Corridoni was a tribune of the people and extremely popular. He had for years been fighting for revolution and idealistic Syndicalism against the more narrow forms of economic socialism and against the materialistic tenets of those who talked about "the Question of the Belly"—*la questione del ventre*. An individualist and anti-Parliamentarian, a self-taught artisan, he had seen the inside of many prisons by the time he was twenty-seven. He carried the spirit of a gallant fighter in the frail body of a consumptive. Despite his malady, he was one of the first to volunteer for the front the moment Italy entered the war and he met his death heroically in the first line of the trenches.

Mussolini and this Corridoni together prepared the state of mind which was to result in intervention.

And it was now that Mussolini proposed the banding together of his young followers into the *Fasci di azione rivoluzionaria*, just as later, after the war, for the purposes of another form of revolutionary intervention, he formed them into the *Fasci di Combattimento*.

As an outcome of his long membership of the rigidly dogmatic Socialist Party, Mussolini had grown

to dislike the very idea of "Party," to regard it as an antiquated, purely static conception : a sort of political *mariage de convenance*. No "Party" for him !—just at present, anyway. What he contemplated was something more in the nature of a "free union," freely entered into, without that coercion of the individual which is involved in the Party system ; a temporary union, moreover, with an immediate objective, a union of intellectuals, with liberty of conscience, and benefiting as all intellectuals must from the occasional goad of doubt. These bands of vigorous and eager youths in January, 1915, two months after the founding of the *Popolo d' Italia*, counted already more than 5,000 adherents in various parts of the peninsula. "They have not," wrote their founder on the occasion of their first assembly, "and do not wish to have, the rules or the rigid methods of a Party, but are, and wish to remain, a free association of volunteers, ready for everything—whether for trenches or for barricades. I think that something big and new may be born of these bands of men who stand for Heresy and who have the courage of Heresy.

"There is in many of them that habit of unprejudiced investigation which rejuvenates—or kills—doctrines ; in others, there is that faculty of intuition which grasps the meaning and the bearing of a situation ; in all, there is the hate of the *status quo*, the scorn of Philistinism, the love of adventure, and the zest for peril.

"To-day it is War, it will be Revolution to-morrow!"

What there was question of, Mussolini maintained, was no running blindfold into needless risks. Their objectives were clear and distinct :

"Our intervention," he continued, "has a double purpose—national and international. By a singular historic circumstance our national war may help towards the realization of vaster aims of an international order. *Our* war, I say, and not the war which the governing classes of Italy may be preparing." By freeing Istria

and the Trentino they would be contributing to the downfall of the Austro-Hungarian Empire, that oppressor of so many races and that bulwark of reactionary Europe; and this would lead to the overthrow of the militarism of Germany, thereby averting the greatest danger by which the free nations of Europe were faced. Perhaps it would lead to revolution alike in Germany and in Russia and thus contribute a long stride forward " in the cause of liberty and of revolution."

Yes, revolution ! He insisted repeatedly on the fact that the intervention which he favoured was an intervention of revolutionaries, of anti-Constitutionalists, not the intervention of the moderates and nationalists and imperialists. Before constructing a new world it was necessary to get rid of the ruins of the old. The war should serve to sweep away all that was worst in modern capitalism and industrialism. . . .

Having started in this way the movement in favour of intervention, Mussolini persisted valiantly and vehemently in the struggle. On April 19th, in Rome, his ardour at a meeting led to his arrest and imprisonment. Ten days later he fought, and wounded slightly, Signor Treves, in a duel with swords. It was not his only duel in that period of strenuous exertion.

Now came the moment when Prince Bülow made his famous offer. We were to get a part of the Trentino, and actually the city of Trent, without striking a blow. Giolitti, too old to understand the rising generation of Italians, was in favour of acceptance. Germany, as unimaginative and stupid with us as she had shown herself in her dealings with Russia and France and England and the United States, reckoned confidently on our being willing to bargain with her. She took no count whatever of the effect which the destruction of Rheims and of Louvain had had upon our minds. In reality, on the day when Belgium was invaded the die was cast in favour of Italian intervention. On the day when Mussolini sent forth the sacred watchword,

" Trento and Trieste," there remained nothing for it but to draw the sword.

We had, indeed, to endure first the humiliation of those days in the middle of May which we call " the week of Giolitti "—those days of anxiety and humiliation when it really seemed that our Government, under Giolitti's baneful influence, might take the German bait, but Salandra eventually rose to the occasion and war was declared against Austria-Hungary on the 24th of the month.

It was Mussolini and Corridoni who had done most to pave the way for this decision, but they were to have a brilliant and invaluable ally in the poet, Gabriele d' Annunzio, who in the Spring of 1915 had come back to Italy from France, and who at once began a series of impassioned speeches in favour of war.

Needless to enlarge on the joyful feelings with which Mussolini and his associates welcomed the triumphant climax to their labours. Writing in the *Popolo d' Italia* on that 24th May, he expressed himself in these words :

" From to-day onwards the nation is called to arms ! From to-day onwards, we are all of us Italians and only Italians. Now that steel has to meet steel, one single cry issues from our breasts : *Viva l' Italia !*

" Never before have we felt so strongly as at this moment that the Fatherland exists, that it is an undeniable element in the consciousness of mankind. Never have we felt so strongly as now at this commencement of the war that Italy is an historic personality, living, breathing, immortal !

" O Mother Italy, we offer thee, without fear and without regrets, our life and our death ! "

CHAPTER XXVII

A GREY-GREEN IN THE RANKS

The *Avanti's* Taunt—The Italian Volunteers—Mussolini goes to the Front—Life in the Ranks—Promotion to Corporal—His War Diary.

"WHY is not the famous Interventionist off to the War?"

The *Avanti*, which from the day of Mussolini's expulsion from the Socialist Party down to the date of the General Election in 1919, never once printed his name, was never tired of asking this question during those early months of the war when, as a matter of fact, he was unable to enlist as a volunteer, for at any moment his military class—the 1884 class—was liable to be called up.

Poor volunteers! It was not until August, 1916, that the Government remembered the respect and consideration due to them—they had previously been a target for gibes and sneers. There were 200,000 of them—a number unparalleled in any other country in which obligatory military service existed. A number to call forth thought and wonder and reverence.

Youths and grown men, boys and greybeards, they were the flower of their race. There was one old veteran among them who at sixteen had enrolled under Garibaldi. Many of them were fathers of large families. Among them were truants from school. How many of them were spared by the inexorable shears?

Unfortunately many of our military leaders had been trained in idolatrous admiration of Prussia and they viewed with scant sympathy the interventionist fervour of the Volunteers. Many months had passed and many

humiliations had been endured, before the period of neglect and disregard was ended and the importance of the volunteer movement came home to the authorities. Its full significance, indeed, was not grasped until after the war—until the days of Fiume and of Fascism.

When at last the editor of the *Popolo d' Italia* was free to take up arms as a private in the ranks—wearing the grey-green uniform of the ordinary *fantaccino*, he printed in the paper the following letter of farewell :

" Dearest Friends,

" The period of the ' zone of war,' which must not be confused with the ' zone of fire,' is now over. It has been shorter than I anticipated. When these lines shall be before the eyes of our people, I shall be beyond those wickedly-drawn frontier lines which must be cancelled because they are a peril and a shame too long endured. I do not need to tell you that I am happy ! You who have been my comrades in our long vigil and who remain to-day the resolute and faithful pursuers of my tasks, you know how I have looked forward to this hour ! My joy is intensified by the sight of the courage which prevails among the men belonging to a class of such a year as '84.

" The masses are sound. I believe that in the zone of fire these fellow-soldiers of mine will be ready for every sacrifice. They are men of strength upon whom we can count. My impressions, therefore, are definite and optimistic.

" The Italian army goes forward to victory ! Certain ! Inevitable !

" But we who are making ready to endure the hardships of winter in the trenches and the dangers involved for combatants, wish to have our shoulders safe. Be, therefore, ever on the watch ! Give out strenuous blows ! Do not allow the hyænas an instant's peace !

"We shall fight. Fight also you!

"The programme which I leave to you is embodied in this motto: *Per non disarmare* —'Let there be no disarming.'

"I know that you are faithful to this watchword. I know that you are not disarming and that you will not disarm. You are burning with the same fire as I, you feel a deep affection for this journal to which you have given your best efforts; you understand that the magnificent battle begun by me ten months ago is not yet finished but has entered merely upon a new phase; you hate—with the same hatred felt by me—all our enemies who are the enemies of Italy.

"As for me, I have no personal pre-occupation. I am ready to take all the blows of Destiny. They matter little. As the proud Roman saying has it: '*Necesse navigare*,' *non* '*vivere*.'"

And he goes on to tell of some moving instances of "Interventionists" in Milan and elsewhere who had refused posts of comparative safety along the lines of communication. Naturally he did not say all that he might have said of his own example in this respect.

There is no one so sensitive as the Italian to the fascination of a leader, a chief—*un Capo*. The Italian, when well led, is the best soldier in the world. He gives everything enthusiastically to the man of higher character and standing who is placed above him. There is no race more addicted than the Italian to the cult of hero-worship. Abstract ideas do not carry them away—the idea must be embodied in a man of heroic stamp. Him they will follow with incomparable single-mindedness. Our whole history demonstrates this. Even the Camorra and the Maffia are but distortions of this national tendency. The war gave new proofs of it. A good captain, a good lieutenant, a good sergeant, any man in the ranks who showed a gift for leadership, brought into

existence among his followers unheard-of prodigies of valour and devotion.

Mussolini's first captain was a man of this order. "He was a staff officer at first," writes of him the new soldier-journalist, "but he preferred to resume command of the Company. He is a man who knows men, a soldier who knows soldiers. The Bersaglieri have a great regard for him. He does not need to have recourse to disciplinary measures to ensure that everyone does his duty."

The writer himself was just such another born leader of men. "Signor Mussolini, now that we have seen that you have *molto spirito* (much courage) and now that you have led us on the march under shell fire, we want to be under your command!" So said to him one of his fellow-soldiers in the ranks of the Bersaglieri, on behalf of the whole platoon, on the evening of their first day's march. "*Sancta Simplicitas!*" was his own sole comment, but there was a true instinct in the simplicity underlying the words. Many were the tributes of this kind paid to him. "Who could ever have believed that I would find myself in the trenches with Mussolini as a private soldier beside me?" So wrote one youth to his family, and letters full of the same naïve emotion were being addressed continually by others in the regiment to their distant homes in Tuscany or in Sicily or in Calabria.

"For his exemplary activity, his fine *bersagliere* courage and serenity of mind . . . First always in every task involving hard work or boldness. Regardless of discomforts, zealous and scrupulous in the discharge of his duties"—a splendid character to be given one! You might suppose it to be the prelude to an appointment to some high post of command. But, no! What was in question was only Mussolini's promotion to the rank of corporal!

He was eventually to rise to that of sergeant—never to that of officer. It was true that he had never actually been a volunteer but he deserved to be treated as such!

One day in November after several months of special service in the front line of trenches, Mussolini was recalled to his regiment at the base. When the time came for publishing his Diary of the War he thus summed up his experiences at the Front :

" I spent the first months of my active service as a private in the ranks in the trenches of the Alto Isonzo zone in the autumn of 1915. Those who, with me or after me, made their way over those tragic passes of the Ursig, the Jaworcek and the Kuhl, in a temperature twenty degrees below zero (as again in the February of 1916), will not easily forget those days of extreme hardship. I went through the second phase of the war in the Carnia, a relatively tranquil zone, but with great discomforts especially in winter. The first snows fell on September 20th. Afterwards we came to the famous region of Bassissimo Isonzo. The first period of the trenches on the Carso was already over."

In that " War Diary " of his there is never a word of anything approaching a complaint. Not merely are there no grumblings or protests against the hardships of fate—there was none even against the culpable inertia and incompetence and baseness of men.

It is one of the most memorable of war books. Its records, of course, are almost always fragmentary. Everything is fragmentary in the wars of to-day—perhaps it was always so. Stendhal's Fabrice fought at Waterloo without knowing it was a pitched battle and yet his account of it is the best we have.

" *Les Mémoires du Sergent Bourgogne* " is the only book which I could compare with Mussolini's Diary for the force and spontaneity of its direct impressions, the swiftness with which they are transcribed, and, above all, the virile and really soldierly simplicity which characterizes the entire narration :

" Pale sunshine," he notes on one page. " The scene is a mountain trench, under a terribly heavy fire. Nothing to do. Wounded men passing, one by one. Donadonibus,

the *Bersagliere*, is having a glimpse at the sun. Cavalry to right of us, cavalry to left of us," he cries out, and he laughs with the laugh of a man completely happy.

"Afternoon. The sky is darkening," we read elsewhere. "Sharp gusts of rain. . . . Close beside me Rizzati, Massari, and Sandri, all from Ferrara, are talking quietly about hemp and commissions and the markets, and about beetroot, as though they had nothing else to take up their thoughts."

En route to the trenches :

"I write these lines in the yard of a factory, during a halt. One of my messmates is sleeping. Another is writing. Beneath an awning they are playing *morra*. From a distance comes the rumble of cannon. I love this life of movement, rich in things humble and things great."

At a later date, under fire :

"The life of the trenches is a natural life—primitive and a bit monotonous. In the early morning all are on the alert. Everyone gets sleep when he likes. During the day we do nothing. One may go and look for one's friends in the other companies—at the risk and peril of being hit by an implacable *cecchino* (the picked shots of the Austrian army). We play *sette e mezzo*, and when cards are lacking at *testa e croce*. When the cannon are firing, we count the shots. The distribution of food and drink are the only diversions of the day."

Thus he wears spiritually the uniform of the ordinary soldier, sacrificing none of his dignity in the process. On the contrary, his nature is enriched thereby, for hardships and difficulties have the effect only of adding to the strength of the strong.

Putting aside all thought of himself as a writer by profession, using a pencil upon a piece of paper laid out on a drum, or on a block held on his knee—obliged often to omit and cut out and veil—the vigorous scribe, hemmed in by restrictions and regulations, plunges

direct into essentials. He fulfils resolutely the trifling regular daily tasks, without looking to right or left, pursuing quietly but ardently his scientific investigation into a problem which long has absorbed him. How will this old Italian stock react to the brutalities of war? Will "the bath of blood" prove as beneficial as he himself proclaimed it would to this race so long sunk in placid ease?

. . . . . .

"I have spent an afternoon full of happiness and true fraternity." Mussolini writes further on, "Some soldiers of the Fifth Engineers invited me to their cantonments, close by. I should like to record their message, which shows the morale of the Italian troops after a year of warfare. It is a document which I shall preserve amongst the dearest souvenirs of my life. "'To Benito Mussolini,'" it runs, "'who hearkened to the voice of the smoking ruins of Belgium, and of invaded France, and who asserted the rights of humanity against brute force. With the admiration of true Italians and with the affection of his fellow soldiers.'" The signatures follow. And these men who thus expressed their fervid love for humanity and justice, after all the bitter experiences of a year of warfare, were not officers or men of rank, but simply a corporal, a sergeant, and five obscure privates!

After many months of association with the troops, he speaks thus of their morale. "What is 'morale'? It cannot be defined in a few brief words. It belongs to the category of things which are indefinable, they can only be felt, known intuitively. 'Morale' is the sense of responsibility, the impulse towards the fulfilment of duty, the spirit of resistance, which an individual possesses. 'Morale' may vary from moment to moment, from place to place. It is a state of mind essential to victory, especially when troops are opposed by an enemy with great technical skill and efficiency. He will win who has

the will to win ! He will have the victory who has the greatest reserves of energy and determination. A hundred thousand cannon will not give victory if the soldiers will not dash to the assault, if they are lacking in the courage boldly to affront death. We cannot judge of the ' morale ' of troops from one isolated incident. The actions of one soldier might lead one to believe that the entire army was composed of heroes, the words of another might make one believe the exact opposite. The ' morale ' of men in the front line is not that of men in the rear. The older men have a different 'morale' from the younger, the countryman a different from that of the dweller in the city. I have studied those around me, with whom I have shared food and shelter and danger. I have listened to them, noted their attitude of mind in the varying conditions war imposes, in the trenches, under fire, on the march, in rain and snow, and my conclusion is this : the ' morale ' of the Italian troops is excellent. The men are well-disciplined, brave, eager. For him who knows how to take them the right way they will do anything that is asked of them, from the dull routine of labour battalions to the rushing deadly assault of the bayonet charge." He concludes : " To be precise, the ' morale ' of the troops depends on that of the officers who command them."

An army doctor in the Spring of '16 sent him a photograph of Monte Javorcek, with this dedication : " In remembrance of the place where you received the baptism of fire and the supreme happiness of perceiving in the hearts of your fellow-soldiers the splendid spirit of the Italian race."

Now and then he writes a few words of emotion, the more effective for being restrained. " The Isonzo ! I have never seen water more blue than that of the Isonzo. I have bent reverently over that cold stream and drunk a sip with devotion. Sacred river ! "

Or again : " We are amongst the rocks. It is not cold. The night is starry. Silence. We have

BUST OF MUSSOLINI BY WILDT

reached the heights ! the heights ! There is the smoke of the cannon upon them ! "

That cry, " We have reached the heights," is repeated like an outburst of physical and moral relief.

Like his beloved Nietzsche, the corporal of Bersaglieri is extraordinarily sensitive to atmosphere. He reacts to weather, the time, the place, with the intensity shown by primitive beings. How often have I seen him, after a cheerful day, suddenly, as dusk fell, become filled with melancholy. And I have heard him on a glorious spring morning say to one beside him, " To think that some day there will be a springtime which we shall not share, and that we shall not see the sun, nor the trees—we shall be beneath the earth. Where, where shall we be then ? Under the sod ? A sad thought."

In warfare, the weather is of great importance ; in warfare amongst high mountains it is, indeed, decisive. Some, during the war, laughed at the bulletins of General Cadorna and called them " meteorological reports." But those strategists of the café had never seen trenches in the mountains. Had they done so, they would have known what an immense amount of suffering, of patient preparation, can be brought to naught and wasted at a blow by changes in the weather.

What miracles our wonderful Alpini accomplished in these circumstances, fighting against both the enemy and the frost ! And not only the Alpini, but the whole army, including men from Calabria and Sicily, and the gaunt heroic islanders from Sardinia, men who had never before left their sunny lands or had experience of the biting cold and barren hostile country of the mountainous north.

" The Eleventh Bersaglieri is the Italian regiment *par excellence*," says our Corporal, " all, or almost all, of the provinces of Italy are represented in it. Yet, no one says, ' I am going back to my country,' they say ' I am going back to Italy.' Italy thus appears for the first time to her sons as a living entity, as the mother country."

As one now familiar with mountain-warfare, he writes : " When in Italy you talk of trenches, your thoughts turn to the English, dug into the low-lands of Flanders, and furnished with many comforts, not excluding, they say, thermos-flasks. But our men, 2,000 metres above the sea, fare differently. They are in holes scraped out of the solid rock, entirely exposed to the weather. We do not have to drive our enemy out of fortresses, but out of mountains. Here the granite is a weapon as deadly as the cannon ! "

Notes on the conditions are mingled with other observations. Thus :

" *Oct. 4th.*—Night clear and starry until midnight. To-day it snowed. Practised bombing."

" *March 2nd.*—Night on guard. Snow, snow. We are drunk with its whiteness."

" *March 31st.*—After so much snow, a marvellous sunny morning. In the translucent distance the profiles and lace-like pinnacles of the mountains stand out clearly. Far away can be seen the Dolomites of Cadore. A thin line of purple announces the sun. If only I were a poet ! Meanwhile, to work ! The mules are covered with snow. The ways of approach to the first and second lines are blocked. Whirlwinds of snow on the summits."

In the terrible month of November, among the high peaks, he writes :

" Towards midnight, after six hours of rain, came a great white silence. The snow. We are buried in mud, soaked to the skin. Simoni said to me : 'We cannot feel our feet.' The snow fell slowly, slowly. The cold freezes one's marrow. We are condemned to absolute immobility. To move would be to attract the Austrian fire. Near me someone complains. The lieutenant rebukes him, but the Bersagliere replies despairingly, 'I am frozen, I can't bear it.' He was a Southerner. Shortly after the lieutenant sent me and Simoni to ask that we should be relieved. Our spell should have

lasted another fourteen hours. We found the captain, awake, smoking. We told him, 'Sir, the lieutenant sends us to inform you our post can hold out no longer after six hours' rain and four hours' snow.'"

"*Dec. 25th.*—To-day, as for the past month, it has rained. It is Christmas Day, the third Christmas of the war. I have had Christmas cards sent me which bring back to me echoes of my distant childhood. Twenty-five years ago I was a rough, violent little boy. Some of my contemporaries still bear the marks of my assaults. A truant by instinct, from morning till night I would roam by the river banks, robbing nests and stealing fruit. The Christmas of those days lives in my memory. I went to Mass, those who did not attend Christmas Mass were very few. The trees and hawthorn hedges which bordered the road to S. Cassiano were silvered over with frost. It was cold. The first Masses were for the old early risers. When we saw them emerge, it was our turn. I remember I followed my mother. Inside the church were many lights, and in the midst the altar. In a little flower-decked cradle lay the Holy Child. All this appealed to my imagination, only the incense went to my head and almost overwhelmed me. A peal from the organ ended the ceremony. The crowd swarmed out. Along the street people poured, chattering cheerfully. How many years have passed since then! The sound of guns recalls me to reality. It is Christmas in war-time, and in the trenches reigns silence, full of secret home-sickness."

Amidst all these privations there came a pleasant incident which the Chief always recalled with a quiver in his voice whenever he referred to it. A member of the staff of the *Popolo*, now a captain, came through several miles of trenches, through snow and mud and under fire, on that sad Christmas evening to bring his warm, devoted greeting—and, in addition, the cheering material comfort of a nice roast chicken!

. . . . . .

The terrible sufferings of these nights in the trenches, in snow and mud, are seen and described with restraint. Of himself, scarcely a word. At the most a few sighs escape him—the quiet sorrow of a strong man.

In this communion of human beings and in a gentleness scarcely noticeable and shared by all, in the help given to the wounded, in the caress of a child, in the common brotherhood of sacrifice, gratefully we admit that war is not entirely a barren waste of horror.

Even in warfare you will find the virtues of common life. There are moments in which man, exposed to risks of an exceptional crisis, either sinks below the level of the brutes or is elevated to the sublime.

CHAPTER XXVIII

MEMORABLE PILGRIMAGES

A Pause in the War, Cemeteries, September 1922—An Oak—The Death of Corridoni—A Personal Favour in the Shape of Murder—The Carso of Blood—In the Trenches—A Terrible Scene in Hospital.

THE motor carried us rapidly over the countryside. Despite the glorious sunshine, the softness of the air, and the peaceful landscape, how sombre seemed the district of the Carso ! Even to-day, when the war no longer weighs down our hearts so terribly, that name sounds like a knell. All around men were at work collecting from the thickets and fields and hedges thousands of unexploded shells and bombs. Every variety of projectile was there, and Mussolini called them all by their names with the familiarity of the veteran.

We passed the line of the old Italian frontier ; one of us, a woman, knelt down and kissed the earth. We came to the banks of the Isonzo. Its waters are blue as are those of no other river. " By the banks of the Tiber Italy was born, by the banks of the Isonzo she was born again," wrote Mussolini in his Diary. And later, " Now a sinister name, a name which rings in the ear like a death-knell—Caporetto! Here is the church of Caporetto ! Beyond rises Monte Nero, its terrible summit veiled in cloud, and its feet clothed with sweet cyclamen. There I received my baptism of fire. I went into action at ten o'clock one night. The Austrian machine-guns begin their clatter, their ta-ta-ta rattles with fantastic speed. Hand grenades hurtle through the air. After midnight the firing becomes intense. . . . I have to move in order to make way for a wounded man whose arm has been smashed by a shell. He begs me to give him water, but the soldier who is carrying

him begs me not to do so. I cover him with my cloak. Towards dawn the firing ceases. . . . My first night in the trenches has been eventful. Now the guns are silent. The valley is filled with mist, on the heights where we are stationed, the sun."

Now the grass grows on the graves in the *Campo santo* of Caporetto, and the sight of that lonely graveyard " at the foot of the steep slopes of Monte Nero " fills with " sadness and silence " the hearts of those comrades who come to visit their fellow-soldiers who have passed on before. Always when he went on leave, or if he had been in hospital, the corporal of the Bersaglieri visited the graves of the fallen. Alas ! each time he found the cemetery fuller than before. " In November there were 300 graves," he writes in February, 1916, " now there are 600, and more are being dug. I found on the crosses the names of many of my companions of the 11th. Above them is written ' here all are united.' "

Hard upon these thoughts comes the warning of approaching sacrifice. We have reached the end of September, 1922, one month before the march on Rome. What words will the dead hear whispered now? Slowly, with bent head, he passes through the ranks of graves. " Here," he says, pausing and instinctively standing erect before a mound, " here lies my captain. A brave man." A long moment of silence, with bared head. No one speaks in the group which has gathered round. News had spread that the editor of the *Popolo*, after his speech at Udine, had come to visit this scrap of ground, still torn by the wounds of war. It had spread like wild-fire, calling together immediately a group of fervent followers both of the journal and of the man.

Perhaps in the minds of all those present there arose recollections of the killed who lay scattered along the narrow front, left buried amongst the mountain tops. To them the recruit, on his first day in the trenches, had sworn " Poor dead comrades, buried on the lonely ranges ! I will bear your memory in my heart ! "

The never-forgotten promise was observed as faithfully as a commandment. To their memory, to the grateful remembrance of their sacrifice, he consecrated every drop of his blood, every effort of his muscles and nerves, every action, every noble impulse of his life.

Not for nothing was it that the first solemn official act of the Fascist Government, after the revolution of October 24th, was to render homage to the Unknown Soldier, who symbolized in himself the memory of all the dead, known and unknown, the seed of life, not buried but sown abroad on fertile soil and on stony ground as in the parable of the Gospel. "I will bear your memory in my heart." By reason of that oath and by reason of that memory, working through thoughts and actions, the youth of Italy have followed and will follow him. The tombs of the slain have been turned to altars.

. . . . . .

Farther along the road the motor slows down and stops. "Look, here I received the news of the death of Corridoni." And he tells the story. "I was resting here, when a soldier came up and asked if I were Mussolini? I said I was. 'Good, I have a nice piece of news for you. Corridoni has been killed. A good thing, too. . . .'" He added various epithets to indicate the bad opinion he held of the dead man.

Mussolini, pale as death, had sprung to his feett Already his rifle was trained on this brute, perhaps with the intention—who knows?—of discharging it, when he heard footsteps, and a picket came up, accompanied by a sergeant. "What are you doing, Corporal?" Sadly, with death in his heart, dropping his rifle, he went on his way. Corridoni, that faithful, gallant comrade, was dead. Why? For whom? For these creatures who trampled on his still-warm body. To fight, is it worth while? Or to die? "Father, forgive them, they know not what they do."

. . . . . .

A soldier belonging to the same squadron, shortly

after this received a letter from the head of the Socialist group in his village, containing the following words : " I hear that you are at the front with that renegade Mussolini. You would do a personal favour to me and to all your comrades if you made up your mind to kill that traitor."

" After that," said the follower of Machiavelli, " do you wonder that I despise humanity ? "

But for truth's sake, and that of men's honour, it should be said that the soldier from whom this personal favour was asked showed that letter to his great comrade, saying : " See what extraordinary ideas the save-their-skins-at-home have ! "

. . . . . .

Now we came to that terrible spot, terrible yet glorious, the Carso. " To think that the war correspondents pretended to describe this ! " is Mussolini's sarcastic comment. " Did they ever even see it ? . . . A dark sky, and a darker soil—red with human blood." He himself, after a month spent uninterruptedly in the trenches, realized that during that time he had never washed his face. The water of the lake was unusable, cholera had already claimed innumerable victims, and better far to die from a shell than from cholera in the hospital ! " Beside the borders of the lake lay dead bodies. . . . When the wind blew that way it bore with it the stench of corpses. . . . Dead everywhere. . . . No wonder the very name of Doberdo became a horror. . . . The assault of that rock—what a marvellous page of Italian heroism ! . . . Lake of Doberdo, he who dwells long beside your banks will lose the power to laugh. Tragedy is embedded in the very stones. . . . For hours Austrians and Italians bombarded each other. The whole sky seemed full of the whistling of shells. During a bombardment I prefer to be alone. Do I imagine that thus it will be more difficult for the shells to find me ? . . . What seas of blood have been drunk up by the red soil of the Carso ! "

Now, a little farther along, we come to the trenches where he fought so long. Of all the European fronts, this was the one closest to the enemy. We measured, now, calmly and accurately, the distance between our trenches and those of the Austrians. It was exactly twenty-two metres.

One of the chauffeurs, who had also been an infantryman in these trenches, said : " We heard all about this ' Mussolini ' who was in the lines in front of us, and who was so bold, but to tell the truth, we all thought he was ' Musolino,' the brigand of Calabria," and at this our Chief laughed heartily.

He told us that his " speciality " was to collect live bombs, fallen behind the Bersaglieri, a dangerous game, needing much quickness both of eye and hand. " Once," he said, " at night, I saw in the enemy's trenches five little glowing sparks. I took aim with a bomb, a loud explosion followed, and the five lights went out." He spoke with a faint touch of horror, and even now, if he sees the glow of a cigarette shining in the dark, a shadow passes across his face.

Here, in these trenches, on the 23rd of February, 1917, he took part in a terrific bombardment, overwhelming the enemy with a rain of bombs. The trench-mortars became almost red-hot.

While unsurpassed for bravery, he also knew how to be prudent. He called the attention of the lieutenant to the trench-mortar. " Signor Tenente, we must stop, the metal has cracked, there will be an accident." " Just once more, Sergeant ! " That " once more " burst the mortar. Those around were killed or maimed, the lieutenant himself gravely wounded.

Mussolini, terribly lacerated, was hurled some distance away and stunned. When he came to himself, he was taken to Doberdo to the dressing station, and later to the hospital. The doctor who received him at Aquileia tells how one day he was informed by the captain, in a voice broken with emotion, " Mussolini is

here, wounded " ; up to that time all had been ignorant of the fact that the editor of the *Popolo* was in the trenches. Fever set in. He showed himself very reserved, quiet, silent, almost shy. When he was taken to the operating theatre and felt the knife enter his flesh, he met the spasm of pain by closing his lips with a smothered curse, but immediately relaxed and smiled gently at those around.

I remember the terrible shock when the news that he was wounded reached Milan. What fearful details ! Forty-two wounds, his whole body bruised, full of splinters of every size. Each day hours of painful dressings to be endured. He seemed like San Sebastian, his flesh pierced as with arrows, scarred with wounds and bathed in blood.

The King visited him in the hospital, and one day asked him if the absolute immobility which the case necessitated was not very irksome ? How irksome it was only those who have suffered can tell, but being strong he knew how to be patient.

Aquileia ! There in the cemetery, in the shadow of the ancient church, sleep the dead, killed in the war. There sleep the eleven of the twelve unknown warriors, from all parts of the front, from amongst whom was chosen the one whose bones now lie gloriously in the Capitol of Rome. There, at Aquileia, was the first resting-place of the wounded man, the first stage on the road to convalescence. From Aquileia, when he was slightly recovered, he was taken with the greatest care to the hospital at Ronchi, where amongst others he was visited by the King. Ronchi—another memorable name in the history of new Italy. From Aquileia, the Roman colonists, flying before the Huns, had carried the eagles to the Lagoons of the Adriatic and thus Venice arose. From Ronchi the indomitable will of Gabriele d'Annunzio transported the tricolour to the farther shores of that same Adriatic, to Fiume.

" I am filled with pride," were the first words traced

with a feverish hand by the wounded man, in response to a request for a message to the *Popolo*. "Say that in order that the ideals of justice which animate the allied armies may triumph, I will accept without a murmur an even more severe trial. I am proud to have watered with my blood, in attempting to fulfil my duty, that road which leads to Trieste."

. . . . . .

Great was the excitement in the newspapers over the convalescence of so popular a man. One paper was imprudently given leave to publish a photograph of the patient and the hospital, with a note explaining where he was.

At once, from out the sky, came an aeroplane, which proceeded to fire upon the hospital correctly identified, where lay this enemy so deeply feared and hated. A terrible scene followed, described in the Diary:

"*March 18th.*—Eight o'clock. The sound of an aeroplane. . . . A shell falls near the hospital. Another. A third. The nurse remains calm. 'Perhaps,' she says, 'they have not seen the Red Cross on the hospital.'

"Another! . . . Operations and dressings are going on as usual on the ground floor. . . . Another shell falls, nearer than the previous ones. A thick white dust fills the room. One of the wards is struck. The wounded fall back terror-struck on their beds. Their cries fill the building. The wounded from the other ward are brought into ours. The doctor comes and helps to calm them. . . . The shells continue to fall, and each explosion is followed by a mortal silence. At last the sounds cease. The doctor comes in and announces that the wounded will be transferred to another place. . . . I am to remain, as I cannot be moved. The doctors and nurses remain, but of all the wounded I alone am left. Silence and dusk."

. . . . . .

Finally, one day, he is pronounced well and is sent to Milan.

I shall never forget going to see him. He was so exhausted he could scarcely speak. He smiled out at us from his pale face, his eyes sunken in great hollows. His lips scarcely moved, one could see how horribly he had suffered. Someone asked if he would like a book to read. He refused. "I read only this, because it is familiar. I cannot read anything new," and he showed a volume of Carducci's poems, a tonic for weary souls. Another day he was worse. Splinters had had to be extricated from his wound and he had suffered much from the operation and the dressings. He refused to have chloroform, saying that the mind should be able to rise above pain. The third time I went he was better. He said he was an exceptional patient, he was determined to get well. While I was there I remember there came news of some success gained by our troops, an advance on the Bainsizza. He held the map showing the theatre of war in his hands and we studied it with our hearts full of triumph and exaltation.

Later, on an autumn evening, at a great musical function at the Scala, I heard that Mussolini was present. And so, indeed, he was. He walked with a stick, having not long before dispensed with crutches. It was strange to see him in those luxurious surroundings—he still bore with him the atmosphere of the hospital. The trenches, suffering, life and death seemed to hang like a web around him. I remember vaguely the effect he produced on me. A terrible cloud seemed to come up and cover the sky and overcast our spirits. A terrible feeling of depression and suffering. Even now I cannot shake it off. A pang goes through me every time I see that word "Caporetto."

CHAPTER XXIX

BEFORE AND AFTER CAPORETTO

A Change of Tone in the Diary—A Warning as to Leninist Influence *Une Paix Quelconque*—Mussolini admonishes the Government—Italy and the Allies—The Tragedy of Caporetto—A Forecast of Victory.

IN his latter days at the front the Diary no longer has the same tone. A few strangely discordant notes appear.

"*January* 27, '17.—Snow, cold, perpetual unpleasantness. Orders, counter-orders, disorders."

To those who know the man, these brief utterances are signs of an unhappy frame of mind. He saw many things on which he makes no comment, and their portent may be inferred from the little he does say.

Thus: "Our officers press me too insistently as to my opinion of the duration of the war."

A little later, even more ominous:

"Troops returning from leave show very bad *morale*. They talk amongst themselves of the tumult which has arisen in Italy because the 'old men' and women want peace. One can see that the officers have something on their minds. At Rome, intrigues are on foot."

And he concludes with the terribly prophetic cry: "A Government based on national feebleness!"

Indeed, from the outset, he saw where danger threatened. From the moment when he gave up journalism and civilian life in exchange for the uniform of a "grey-green" he stressed the words already quoted, "Do not disarm! Be on your guard! We do not wish to be stabbed in the back!" Unhappily, this could

not be ensured. It was not in the power of the corporal, of the soldier, to warn and to foresee all.

Nevertheless, he did take advantage of a brief interval of leave in December, 1915, to issue a warning against " the insidious and subterranean propaganda of the priests and the Socialists " who " were working for peace at all costs, a peace of compromise, even one with the Hohenzollerns."

" Une paix quelconque " were the very words spoken in Paris by one of our most prominent Socialist deputies. Other prophetic words were spoken by Mussolini exactly one year later when on leave in November, 1916. An Interventionist had just been killed by the Socialists who favoured neutrality, and in this incident he perceived a serious symptom. He writes : " This sordid, obstinate, hateful propaganda has poisoned and will continue to poison the minds of the populace. It will not, indeed, prevent Italy from following the course she has mapped out for herself, no indeed, not that ! But it does threaten to awaken in the land that unhappy spirit of 'sanfeidismo' (do nothingism) which was the torment of Italy during the Risorgimento." Fiercely he turns upon Signor Orlando : " This is not the time to ' ignore,' to take no notice," he admonished the Italian Premier. " Your vacillating, wavering policy must stop. The lawyers in the Government follow a poor policy in peace and a worse one in war ! A nation in arms should have a government of soldiers. Rome, mother of ancient wisdom, can teach you something of this."

He concludes : " There should be no mercy for the soldier who flies before the enemy and none for him who tries to stab the nation in arms in the back."

Orlando, in truth, had too small a mind to appreciate the greatness of the passing hour, or to care much for those who would spare nothing in the cause of their country.

The people themselves, however heavy the burden, and despite the incitements of the lazy and the criminal,

would never lay it down before having reached the goal. The liquidation of the *ancien régime* in Europe had begun and must be brought to a conclusion. After the Romanoffs came the turn of the Hohenzollerns and the Hapsburgs. The Central Powers were doomed. The new generation in Italy was ready to go to the citadel of Trent to complete the rite of purification. Now or never was the word ! The Government itself never foresaw the terrible danger of the cry being raised : " Let us retreat." Mussolini felt it by instinct from that August day when in hospital he had studied the map in order to follow the advance on the Bainsizza, and had thus expressed himself :

" Members of the Cabinet, Italy once more offers herself to you, strong in her energy, animated by all her hopes, full of heroism and determination. Do not waste such treasures. The Bainsizza has been occupied. The Austrians have suffered a reverse. Great possibilities open before us. . . . A war of movement has hitherto been proscribed by the pundits who rule the Press. A war of exhaustion, a long-drawn-out agony, this has been the language of both Neutral Socialists and the Vatican. When the Pope speaks of the war as ' a prolongation of useless carnage,' he is speaking of that military policy which condemns us to a stationary front. With the capture of the Bainsizza, will this policy change? Can we hope for this ? . . . Gentlemen of the Government, leave for a moment your usual preoccupations with administration. Leave your party quarrels. Compose those fatal differences which hamper the success of our arms. . . . Tell those who fight that not in vain do they toil and struggle, tell those who suffer at home that their sorrow shall be turned into joy. Ancient Rome gave land to her legionaries. England to-day looks forward to a similar policy. Give the German gold to the families of the fighters ! The land to the peasants ! Reforms, however radical, are due to those who have made such great sacrifices. Send a wave of hope through

cities and villages ! You owe much to this people which is resolved to conquer and *will* conquer."

All in vain. The Government would not lead, it only let itself be led. Its members were not missionaries, only functionaries. They had wasted the great promise of May, 1915 ; now they wasted that of August, 1917 !

But a nation which had such reserves of strength will find in itself its salvation, and will cast out the politicians who after three years of world-war continue to follow and apply the old outworn system.

. . . . . .

When did the world ever listen to prophets ? The victory of the Bainsizza, so say those competent to judge, instead of being pressed home and full advantage taken of the sacrifices which had won it, was wasted and thrown away. From that success actually sprang the germs of future disaster, since thereby the first line was moved from its excellent position and drawn out into a long narrow wedge difficult to manage, especially as it obliged too large a body of troops to use lines of communications which were too narrow and too steep.

Some say that the victory of the Bainsizza had its wings clipped for want of troops and, above all, of munitions and of reserves, which—as regards both men and materials—were needed to reinforce and press home the attack.

It is certain that Italy was left too much alone by her Allies, without any aid and obliged to face as best she could the united forces of her enemies. Throughout the war there was endless talk of a united front, but actually little was done in unison. There was no combination in the allied attacks. Every time that our military leaders and politicians asked that the English should not fight only on the French front, but also on ours, they were met with refusals, more or less courteous but none the less decided, not only on the part of the generals but by the Prime Minister, Lloyd George. It is

said that even his own military advisers tried in vain to alter his determination.

Not until three weeks after Caporetto, when our resistance on the Piave had, as by a miracle, stood firm, did there arrive those few battalions of English and French who remained fighting by our sides and whose services were fully recognized in the accounts issued after the glorious day of Vittorio Veneto.

Great as were the military errors, even greater were those of the politicians. The Roman Empire fell when the attacking barbarians without found allies within and the ideas of Christianity weakened the resistance of those who kept the gates. "All are brothers! Resist not evil."

So now another great illusion came in these days from the Slavs. "Great words have crossed the frontiers" and catchwords from Russia hypnotized, like a madness, our own Socialist movement. Hitherto that movement had merely been favourable to Germany and to a policy of neutrality. Now it suddenly turned towards the extreme ideas of Lenin. In vain the Socialist leaders tried to stem the tide of invading Bolshevism. The Government, blind and obtuse, let things slide and allowed great latitude to the Socialists in the illusion that they were showing toleration and liberality. They ignored the fact that such latitude was really criminal in face of the dangers which threatened the country and its defenders.

From another quarter came discouraging words. The Holy Father talked of "useless sacrifices"; and in the Italian Parliament the phrase was uttered, "Next winter there ought not to be one soldier in the trenches," and this was taken up and repeated in thousands of copies of newspapers, pamphlets and leaflets distributed by the Socialists.

The editor of the *Popolo*, though still suffering from his wound, had once more resumed the helm at the office of his paper. He set himself to oppose the evil

influences which he felt arising, and to prepare for the storm which he foresaw would burst upon us. He fought hard, but alone.

"What does it avail," he asked, "to have thousands of guns and machine-guns if this efficiency in material equipment is accompanied by a deficiency in our spiritual equipment? . . .

"The order of the day is this: next winter the war will not be confined to the trenches, the Germans will strain every nerve to break down the unity of the allied nations and will stir up internal opposition to the war." These words are dated September 3rd, 1917.

. . . . . .

The situation became more and more acute. Depression reigned everywhere. To fight? To die? Why?

The editor of the *Popolo* with ever increasing energy repeated in various formulæ his underlying conviction: "Political liberty is for time of peace. In time of war it is treason. It is not possible that while on millions of men there is laid the obligation to fight for their country, a few thousands can be allowed freedom to betray their country and render fruitless the sacrifices of those who fight."

A few days after the great disaster of Caporetto, on October 17th, he issued an appeal which later events proved to be only too well justified: "It is absolutely necessary that a decision should be made. It is not the moment to pander to the extremists and to those who are openly anti-patriotic! The policy which Leninism has brought from Russia must be openly acknowledged as a false policy. . . . We must abandon the great phrase of 'Liberty.' There is another, which in this third winter of the war ought to be on the lips of the Cabinet when they address the Italian people, and it is *Discipline!* . . .

"Our dilemma offers us only two alternatives,

either discipline to-day in order to achieve victory to-morrow, or collapse following upon defeat."

When, after a reverse which was small in itself, and which ought to have been made good, the troops found themselves without guidance and as it were left unsupported, the gravest results followed. "The war is over, let us go home," was the utterance made by these disheartened troops. The fault lay with their leaders, who lost their heads and did not set to work at once to stem the tide of defeat. Facts and documents collected on the spot by the deputy and minister Gasparotto, at that time an ordinary officer of the line, have been published as *The Diary of a Foot-Soldier*. They prove clearly that wherever a competent commander was found, there also were troops found worthy and capable of following his lead, even to the extremity of suffering and death.

When at last reorganization was accomplished, the damage had been done. In those few days, not more than a week, the enemy had been able to overrun two whole provinces, rich and flourishing and thereby to furnish themselves with all the things they so badly needed.

Yet how swiftly and effectively that reorganization was carried through! The troops of the unbeaten Third Army, of the army of the Duke of Aosta, the troops of the Carnia, all the many posts and lines which had never wavered for a day, only withdrew under orders. They withdrew in perfect formation, keeping their front to the enemy, fighting and contesting every inch of the ground. Withdrawn from the Isonzo, they clung to the Tagliamento, fought on the Livenza, and held the line of the Piave.

In the days which followed they clung to that piece of ground with the desperate hope of him who clutches at every twig, every blade of grass, as if to tear him from each twig and blade were to tear him from life itself. In those few days the whole spiritual atmosphere

changed. Deadly days, glorious days ! Every Italian worthy of the name felt himself age in that week from October 25th to November 1st. We had reached up to the heights of victory and Fate had thrown us down into the mud of defeat. But a new Italy arose, unanimous, with but one thought, one resolve, to regain the lost ground, to attain once more to victory. This new spirit was from the outset fanned and encouraged by the *Popolo*, which stood firm from first to last. And the chief protagonist was Benito Mussolini.

Full of spirit and of courage, he inspired and worked without respite. He threw himself heart and soul into the task of strengthening the weak-willed. The whole nation responded to the appeal. In the darkest hour, when all seemed lost and the majority despaired,he never doubted, he never hesitated, he never tired. " Face the enemy ! " was his cry, uttered even on that terrible morning of October 27th, 1917. Confronted by the bulletins which had spread consternation and shame thoughout the downcast country, his first paragraphs strike a manly and dignified note and emphasize " not the gravity but the greatness of the hour." He summoned us to the duel to the death in that zone between the upper and middle Isonzo, in which Austria had flung all her strength, all her reserves and called upon the assistance of her German ally. In this hour the nation should show the world how it could rise to the greatest heights.

The duty of every Italian who was not in the ranks was summed up thus : " To oppose the enemy with all our hearts and souls and strength."

" Unity of Soul " was the battle cry of the 28th October : the need was of a national pact, a pact to resist and to win, triumphing over all controversies of faith, of ideals, of temperament, forming a united front against the enemy who had violated our frontiers, uniting in one brave heart, in one sole " fascio " of inflexible energy.

" If it were possible, by a combination of circumstances, to conquer an army—and our army will never be conquered—when behind the army stands the nation, the attempts of the enemy are bound to fail. And they will fail.

" The dead, our holy dead, call upon us ! The silent oath sworn upon Monte Nero and the memory of Corridoni bids us not to deny in the strife of October the glory of May. Two years before, the days of May had seen in the streets of Milan immense crowds proclaiming their readiness for the greatest of all sacrifices, and two years before Corridoni had bade farewell with the foreknowledge of his approaching fate. . . . We could not throw off the burden before we had reached the goal. We could not betray our dead."

One characteristic of Mussolini is what I call " anticipation." He lives at such a pressure that the future for him is already the present, so clearly does he foresee what is to come.

In those bloodstained days of Caporetto, the *Popolo* was the Mecca to which all turned in need of comfort and faith. Those who came to him went away with lighter hearts, with such confidence had he prophesied the future : " There is bound to be a great battle in the Venetian plain. All lines converge upon it, rivers, valleys, plains. . . . The great mistake of the Allies in the war has been to allow themselves to be penned up in trenches by the heavy static German influence. . . . The decisive blow will be struck in the plain, there must be a pitched battle there, not in the cramped lines of earthworks. Thus good will come out of evil, defeat will be turned into victory. We shall give battle, we shall drive back the enemy and shall march in triumph to the very heart of his territory."

Thus with profound conviction, in his little room in Via Paolo di Cannobio, spoke the visionary, still weak from his wounds, his great eyes looking out from his pale face.

On the 2nd November he issued a fresh set of fiery statements, this time in the form of questions.

There, in the plains of the Tagliamento, was there to be once more a contest between civilization and barbarity? Was it written in the book of fate that the defeat of Teutonism, begun beside a river of France, should be completed by the banks of a river of Italy? We should know in a few weeks or days. Meanwhile, courage!

All this actually was fulfilled, if not by the Tagliamento, yet by the Piave. Though not in a few days, yet in a twelvemonth.

Italy passed through a terrible winter. A winter of bitter cold, of hunger, even for the rich, of gloom and of death. Everything was scarce, bread and lighting and meat, even coal for the factories and fuel for the railways and wood for the stores of the households. The country had nothing more to give except its blood to be poured out in ever-increasing torrents. But honour was saved! Yesterday the anxious question was "Have we coal, or bread, or wood?" To-day it is "Have we iron and explosives and steel for our bayonets?"

"We can endure cold and hunger. They are of no account. Invasion means cold and want and, above all, humiliation. That we will not endure. We ought to win and we shall win!"

We won!

CHAPTER XXX

THE ENEMY RETREAT "IN DISORDER DOWN THE VALLEYS"

Divine Youth—Italy's Supreme Effort—The Victory of Vittorio Veneto—The Spreading of the Great News—The Celebration of the Armistice in Milan.

"A MAN who falls, at the age of thirty, gives up for his country's sake only a part of his life, because he has already lived. But a boy, who has everything before him, who has barely begun to live, gives the whole, his present and his future, that which he is and that which he would become. He possesses, in that will to renounce, the privilege and the secret of a great love. A love indeed, which does not reason or count the cost, a love which says, 'Not merely a drop, but all my blood, not only a part of my life, but the whole of my life, so that Italy may be saved.' And Italy will be saved. Of that there can be no doubt when youths of seventeen, such as Roberto Sarfatti, will go to fight, will go to their deaths without hesitation."

The youth to whom these words were dedicated, perhaps the youngest of those boys who fell, went to see Mussolini with his mother in the January of that terrible winter of war, January, 1918, a few days actually before he was to shed his blood on the desolate summits of Asiago. As the man and the boy looked at each other across the crowded writing-table, one question above all did the younger ask of his older fellow combatant: What do the troops think? Is their "morale" good? And he was only content when he read in that face, as well as heard from those lips, a brief but convincing answer.

He fell, that boy, but he fell in the first victorious

engagement, in the first successful attempt to regain lost ground, after Caporetto.

. . . . . .

Enthusiasm returned. "Turn again, turn again, Garibaldi!" the words of a popular song were taken up by the *Popolo* as a war-cry. In articles, in speeches, made in all the cities and towns of Italy, this return to the "red-shirts" of Garibaldi flamed out. Not indeed to the actual uniform, but to the spirit of those old warriors. "The war will be won by that body of belligerents who can most speedily and effectively alter the character of the war," Mussolini wrote. "I am convinced that, instead of saturating the trenches with human blood . . . we should pin our faith to those men who make war with conviction and passion. The masses are the rock, the will is the mine. The mine can move the rock. . . . The leaders of the army will accomplish nothing unless they recognize the essential importance of a 'picked' element, an element of shock tactics, of volunteers for a forlorn hope. Every army in every age has always had this element, ready to do a little more than is possible for others to perform. . . . We must not curb this ardour. We must leave nothing untried. . . . We must assert this article of faith, 'Nothing is impossible.' . . . The human mass is as inert as the inorganic. A fulcrum will move it, however heavy it may be, and 'a lever can overturn the world' is as true in the spiritual as in the material world. . . . Christ, Buddha, Mahomet have demonstrated the truth of this."

These reflections are the revelation of an original mind. They were uttered at a time when the war seemed to have reached an utterly arid mechanical phase. Guns, tanks, machine-guns—masses of troops! Nothing else was thought of. The great originality of Mussolini lies in this, that while on the surface he may seem changeable, yet in reality his nature is unalterable and forms a harmonious whole. In some respects he may appear a romantic. In essentials he is a pure classic, a

Roman of the ancient mould, in the assurance with which he places us, mankind, and our human will, in the centre of creation as its ruling force.

I remember how, in the spring of 1918, the third anniversary of Italy's entry into the war, he spoke of the responsibility for that act and rebuked those who now regretted having taken that course. "We will leave such base moral cowardice to those who go about seeking for applause ; and those who, like myself, think but poorly of parliamentarianism and demagogy are far from that line of action. . . . There comes a moment when 'we must assert our will.' All that Machiavelli points out ("The Prince," cap. 6) in speaking of those who by their own strength acquired power, can be applied not only to individuals, but to races. 'In examining,' says the great Florentine, 'the actions and lives of these men, we see that they had no great assistance from fortune, save opportunity, which enabled them to shape things as they pleased, without which the force of their spirit would have been spent in vain. . . . While their opportunities made these men fortunate, it was their own merit which made them recognize these opportunities and turn them to the glory of their country.'

"Equally one can say that without the opportunity of the war, the merits of our country might have been wasted, but without those merits the opportunity of the war would have passed by."

This was his contention : where there is the will, there will be a victory. Brute, material force will not prevail over the spirit which knows how to arm itself. He recognized, certainly, with his intuitive knowledge and his experience of life, which the war had enriched, that there had been a great mistake made at the outset, in that month of May, in not going more to the root of things, in not making more sure of victory.

"We, who willed to enter the war, who ought to have seized power, we young men committed then a mistake for which we have paid dearly ; we sacrificed our

glorious youth to miserable old age. . . . I mean not only those who in actual years are aged. Some are born aged. I speak of those who are surpassingly old, who have become incumbrances. They have never understood, never grasped any of the realities of the war."

The mistake must not be repeated. But meanwhile it had produced consequences which did not stop at Caporetto.

In May, 1918, he uttered these grave words: "The battalions of those who return have the slow and heavy step of those who have seen and suffered much. . . . To them we say, Let everyone . . . as he fulfils his appointed task, in the field, in the munition factory, in the noisy city or the silent countryside, let each one, when the task is over, the duty fulfilled, raise the standard of our new campaign. Get rid of the sluggards! Away with those who, half dead themselves, ought to die and be buried decently! We, the survivors, we who have returned, claim the governance of Italy, not to hurl her into dissolution and disorder, but to lead her onwards, higher, to make her in thought and in deed worthy to take her place amongst the great nations who direct the destinies of the world."

All this was to come to pass. It was bound to come, since history tells us that while flesh and blood give movement, rule and direction come from the will and the intellect of man. It was bound to come because the man was there, armed with faith, not only with knowledge but with will.

Later he writes: "Yes, many of our companions have left their bones on the Carso and on the Alps. But we bear their memories in our hearts. Perhaps we shall end by loving those rocks and caves where so many have lived and died. We may love the Carso, that land covered with the crosses which mark the resting-places of the fallen. We may love the Carso from whence we may see the promised land, Trieste. . . . To those who fell on the Carso, those who have fallen now in 1918,

will, as the poet says, 'bear good news to Purgatory.'

"First they will hear of our resistance on the Piave, glorious and wonderful. Then of the great victory of Vittorio Veneto, when in very truth 'on the banks of a river of Italy,' according to the prediction of November, came 'the crowning glory of the story of Italy.'

"The victory of the Piave was the victory of the whole nation, which there found itself. We are proud of the victory of to-day and we make ready our arms and our souls for the greater victory of to-morrow."

Again he speaks: "We must repay the Austrians all we have suffered. We must give them their Caporetto! . . . We recovered from our disaster because we are a nation with a past and which will have a future. But the old Hapsburg monarchy, with no nation behind it, will never recover."

On the 28th October, four days after our advance began, when our troops had already crossed to the left bank of the Piave, Austria attempted to obtain terms of peace, showing a belated love for humanity and the ideals of President Wilson and asking him to negotiate terms. Austria does not change! She behaves now exactly as she did in 1866, when, sooner than negotiate directly with Italy and suffer the indignity of ceding Venetia direct to her despised enemy, she placed herself in the hands of Napoleon III.

If Austria remains the same, Italy however does not. No longer, as in the days of Garibaldi, are her troops restrained from fulfilling their victorious impulses. The Austrian army is driven back, our troops advance triumphantly, "because our men are filled with a sacred fire which will not suffer them to rest until beyond the Isonzo they see the Julian Alps. . . . The Italian troops give the *coup de grâce* to that last fragment of Austria's power, her army. The Italian troops bring the war to an end by their triumphant advance."

Thus we come to the 4th of November, that glorious day—"that day of absolute happiness, when the tumult

of emotions almost stops the beating of one's heart and brings a lump to one's throat. The long agony is at length crowned with triumph and tears of joy spring to eyes which have wept other and more bitter tears. . . .

" Italy regains her unity and puts the seal of accomplishment to the work of centuries. Dante waits for us at Trieste. Not only in his effigy of marble and bronze, but in his immortal verse which marked out the borders of Italy. . . . With him await us the spirits of all who have gone before. They have guided our army, they have led the advance guard. . . . The last act of our drama, begun in 1821, has closed in 1918. . . .

" What words can we write in such an hour ? Words are but vain things before the great facts which face us.

" An immense shout rises from the streets, ringing from Sicily to the Alps : *Viva, viva, viva Italia !* May, 1915 : October, 1918. The beginning and the end ! Will—Constancy—Sacrifice—Glory ! "

. . . . . .

Everywhere in Milan the cry " Victory ! Victory ! " echoed. People rushed up to one another in the streets, laughing and crying. The crowds flocked to the centre of the city, in black compact masses, filled the streets and squares, all clamouring for news.

The brief official despatch, giving the great news, simple, clear, concise, was read out every ten minutes from the lowest windows of one of the newspaper offices and little leaflets giving the official account were distributed and, passing rapidly from hand to hand, spread the glorious news everywhere—peace and victory!

Twenty times I heard that news and was never tired of hearing it. And every time hearts were filled with sacred exultation at those concluding words, "The soldiers of what was once one of the most formidable armies in the world have retreated in disorder down the valleys and on the Castello di Buon Consiglio, and above the Hill of San Giusto, the tricolour now waves."

The sun set that day on the two heights which

faced, the one the Adriatic, the other the Alps, on the two fortresses which mark the natural boundaries of Italy, and for centuries had been the aim of Italians.

Thrice happy those who had seen this accomplished with their own eyes. Happier still those who had worked with their own hands and brains for what had come. Happy also those who perished with that supreme glory before their eyes.

These thoughts passed through my mind as I listened to Mussolini, pale, burning, vibrating, as he recalled the memory of the dead at the great celebration of the armistice held in Milan.

He stood on the pedestal of the monument of the Five Days. On every side pressed the vast crowd, come from every quarter of the city. Everywhere flags waved, everywhere the people overflowed with joyous tumult.

Beneath the great granite obelisk, at the foot of the bronze figures, suddenly Mussolini appeared, as strong and firm as those figures themselves and the whole soul of those people welcomed him. Not the political Chief, still less the demagogue was he in that hour. He was the tribune, but still more the soldier, and because he could answer "Present!" to the call of victory, he could recall to memory in the hearts of those around him those who were absent—those who had fallen, his fellow-combatants.

CHAPTER XXXI

ANTI-CLIMAX

New Wine in Old Bottles—Europe and the Fourteen Points—The Threefold No!—Sufferings—The Barometer of Bolshevism.

IN the great European war, the Italian race won its victory more spectacularly and triumphantly than any other nation. The Italian army carried victory from her own territory right into the heart of the enemy. Our troops beheld before them an open road to Vienna and Budapest, with no army standing between them and those capitals.

Italy, thus victorious as was no other nation in the war, was beaten as no other nation was by the peace. Italy lost in the diplomatic contest which followed the war. Once more she suffered from the leadership of the old, who neither understood nor cared for the new spirit, and who upheld the old method of compromise.

Chief amongst those who prevented the total destruction of Austria was Giolitti, whose dynastic and conservative instincts were shared by many. The best of our politicians, Sonnino, had had so little prevision of the total collapse of Austria that in the famous Pact of London, though claiming for Italy much other territory to which she was entitled, he had not included in his demands the city and port of Fiume.

This half-hearted state of mind was not confined to Italians. A Belgian Minister, after the Russian revolution, when the abdication of the Kaiser was spoken of, replied, " Oh, I don't know about that. Enough crowns have already rolled in the dust. There must be a limit."

These were not the views of the new men, of revolutionaries such as Mussolini. He declared :

"We must have the peace we desire, victorious, just. . . . Germany, who made war on humanity, is destroyed. Bismarck's empire is a ruin. Where is the Kaiser? Where are the princes of Germany? Scattered in flight. The salvation of Germany has come not from within, but from without. . . . We must be worthy of peace, as we were of war. We must keep, in the midst of our triumph, the ideals of this supreme moment. It is the moment when Fate knocks with her golden hammer at the doors of silence and calls our dead to a second life of immortality. . . . Let us lift up our hearts! With dignity, with discipline, with the firmest faith in the destiny of our country and the world!"

President Wilson seems in reality to have grasped the need for remaking Europe. Only he wished to remake it according to the ideas of an American who did not understand the Old World. At the back of his mind lay the desire to see a "United States of Europe," and he did not realize that such a conception could not be translated into fact, by reason of the deep and ancient enmities of Europe. Wilson did at least hold up a great ideal. He put into words what many felt in their hearts, he pointed out a goal to which to aspire.

In his "Fourteen Points" he was supported by Lloyd George, representative of the claims of England, and the two men found themselves drawn together by the bonds of common ancestry and a common speech. They began by dropping at once all talk of "freedom of the seas."

Beside them appeared the strong, dominating personality of the "Tiger," with all the fierceness of his youth reinforced by the craft of age, determined to press to the utmost the demands of devastated France.

All concentrated their animosity on Germany. None remembered that Austria, "poor Austria," had actually been the immediate provoker of the war. Austria was allowed to shuffle off her responsibilities. We found that there was here no longer any enemy for

us to face. Austria existed no more. There existed only Bohemians, Magyars, Jugo-Slavs, all eager to join in the overthrow of the " common enemy." Yet none of these had shown the smallest hesitation in hurling bombs and shells upon our lines. Every concession, every generous gesture towards the conquered was made at the expense of Italy, which, alas ! suffered from the weakness of her representatives. Italy, clamouring for colonies for her increasing population, was denied all share in the German colonies, which were allotted to England. Smyrna was taken and given away to Greece. Even the Dalmatian territory, promised to us in solemn treaties, was not left to us. And not only this, but as a crowning irony, the principle of self-determination was invoked against us, and we were on that pretext deprived of Fiume.

The blame lay with Italy herself. The cause of her failure may be found in her ancient fault, in that she was, as for centuries past, disunited. While France, Italy, Spain, became united peoples in the fourteenth century, Italy alone remained undisciplined, disunited, a prey to external enemies instead of combining to repel them. The same fatal weakness showed itself in her divisions to-day. She was weakened by internal feuds. Her politicians, quarrelling amongst themselves, called in the foreigner, President Wilson, whose ideals and preconceived notions all inclined him to the side of England and France.

On the 1st January, 1919, the *Popolo* issued a leading article with the heading " Dalmatia and Fiume," in which it dealt with the " profound humiliation " and " miserable spectacle " of the country, torn by faction, while England and France, " united and strong," gave an immense impression of solidarity and popularity.

In commenting on the resignation of Bissolati, the *Popolo* enquired whether this was meant as a protest aginst the imperialism of Italy, or against that of France and England. " We must make plain once for all what we mean by ' imperialism,' " it said. "Imperialism

is the law of life, eternal and unchanging. At bottom it is nothing but the need, the desire, the will to expand, felt by every individual and by every nation with vitality. It is the methods employed which differentiate one form of imperialism from another. Imperialism need not necessarily be aristocratic and military; it can, on the contrary, be democratic, pacific, spiritual.

"If France will not give up her political strategy of security by means of the Rhine frontier, why should Italy abandon the similar policy which she wishes to adopt on the Adriatic and Alpine frontiers? If France has no scruples in annexing German populations, why should Italy have any in annexing at the utmost half a million Germans and Slavs? . . . Some may ask, 'And what about a war of democracy?' I answer that the whole basis of the war was democratic. The Central Powers were the strongholds of reaction in Europe, and have been overwhelmed by the democracies. . . .

"The year which has just begun ought to go down to history as the year of world-wide peace. . . . But that peace ought to give the nation complete assurance that the conditions necessary to its full development shall be secured. To attain this, the Government ought to have all its ideas clear-cut and precise, and the people ought to give no cause for the campaign of defamation which is being waged against Italy."

. . . . . .

Bissolati, after his resignation, came to justify his policy in a great meeting held in Milan. How bitterly we all regretted the speech in which this friend of old, brave, devoted and heroic, tried to defend the methods by which he had betrayed the cause! How grievous to hear the fury of the audience against him! How grievous to see the bitter animosity which had sprung up between sections of those who had fought side by side! What a fearful anti-climax from the delirious days of victory!

Once more we saw the old coil of faction raising its head. No one party was ready to submit itself to national needs, to put the country before all else.

The Editor of the *Popolo*, his face pale and set, sat in an obscure place in the hall. But the public was already beginning to recognize him and to feel his magnetism. Suddenly a general shout was raised. "Mussolini, Mussolini, let us hear Mussolini!" At first he would not speak, but suddenly, roused by a particularly strong remark against the claims of Italy to Dalmatia, he sprang to his feet, shouting, "No, no, no!" The audience burst into uproar. Mussolini and Bissolati once more found themselves face to face, opposed as they were in ideals and antagonistic even in appearance. Bissolati, thin, tall, bony, the student and man of letters, honest but incapable of understanding life; Mussolini, strong, robust, broad-shouldered, with the limbs of a fighter, his square Roman face and proud glance, the man of imperious strength and obstinate will.

. . . . . .

Weak and uncertain in foreign policy, the Government showed itself equally feeble in its conduct of home affairs.

"For three years," wrote Mussolini in his paper, "we have urged the Government to prepare its policy towards the men coming back from the war. . . . For three years we have proclaimed the need for a policy of social reform. . . . Now demobilization has begun. We have only the satisfaction of giving the men a triumphant reception due to the soldiers who have actually demolished 'one of the most powerful armies in the world.'"

It was on Jan. 16th, 1919, the *Popolo* thus raised the question of the apathy shown towards those who were returning from the trenches. France was giving each "poilu" a gratuity, 250 francs for each soldier, with additional pay according to length of service and the size of the men's families. Our troops were refused even the

modest proposal of a gratuity of 10 lire for each month in the trenches ! And while the French troops passed, laurel-crowned, amidst shouting crowds through the Arc de Triomphe, the city which had first seen both arches and triumphs remained with nothing but the blue sky blazing down upon an empty Forum. Quietly and unobserved the ' grey-greens ' returned to their homes throughout the towns and villages of the peninsula. " Rome no longer celebrates her triumphs."

When, in 1919, the Socialists had begun to hold pacifist meetings, Mussolini invoked in opposition to their views the memory of Enrico Toti, a man who, though he only had one leg, had joined the cyclists' corps, had gone to the front, and there been killed, fighting, so it was said, to the last. " Toti, Roman Toti, your life and death avail more than the whole body of Socialists. You and the great crowd of heroes who flocked to fight and to die . . . you will never need to fear that the jackals shall fight amongst your bones. . . . Fear not, ye glorious dead ! We will defend you. We will defend your memories."

In two ways this was to be fulfilled. By caring with tender respect for all those who now were faced with want, and by waging war against those who cared nothing for the miseries of others, miserable intriguers and politicians.

" The soldier who has returned from the trenches," Mussolini wrote, " seeks for work and finds none. He has no money and finds it difficult to earn any. It is shameful that those who shouldered the rifle against Austrian and German should now have to hold out their hands for charity, charity which can only satisfy immediate wants but cannot solve the problem. It is terrible that those who were ready to die for their country now cannot finds the means to live."

He wrote in vain. The governing classes had made no preparations for demobilization. The value of the lira dropped day by day. The war industries closed

down, throwing thousands out of work. The Government did nothing to stabilise the exchange, nothing to prevent prices rising, nothing whatever for anyone! Every day the cost of living rose. Misery knocked at the door, and this at the very moment when everyone had looked forward to a Paradise of happiness and peace after those four years of war and suffering.

What a long interminable winter it seemed! How innumerable were those who came with the tale of their woes to the offices of the *Popolo!* They always met with a warm welcome, a friendly word, a helping hand. The editor saw many of them himself. Often our rooms and the staircase and even the narrow street were full of these men. What could be done for them? Very little. Letters of recommendation to business men and industrial magnates, information, advice, money for railway tickets. And to each one was invariably given an allowance of ten lire. "Give him ten lire," was the automatic reply of the editor, without even looking up, when anyone went into his room to report a request for help. He must have murmured those words even in his sleep. Naturally, in addition to those who were really in need of help, many impostors came, professional beggars, such as the anarchist, who would murmur politely: "I don't want to disturb Benito, but—you know——" and who, after a certain amount of polite refusal, would end by accepting monetary assistance. People who dared not "beard the lion in his den" would lie in wait for him, so that he had to arrange to have his midday meal brought in, and would lunch off coffee and a biscuit on the office table. Even then his visitors would stand about the room, arguing noisily until the din so got on the editor's nerves that he would ring for them to be shown out—with the usual gratuity.

It is scarcely necessary to say how quickly the slender funds of the *Popolo* dwindled under this drain. In serious cases an appeal for subscriptions would be made in the columns of the paper, and such appeals

were never made in vain. But the continual coming and going of these poor, exhausted men gave a terrible and sinister impression of the state to which the country was reduced.

Sometimes Mussolini became anxious and worried. More often, with his total indifference to money and his cynical ideas of mankind, he laughed. The manager of the paper would come and tell him their bank balance was exhausted, there had been so many applications for help. He himself would show me the two restaurants near the office full of his protégés. " Just look at them," he would say, pointing out the queue of soldiers silently waiting outside them. " Look, they take money from me and spend it there. If I had any sense I should make a contract with the restaurant-keepers."

They would wait in pouring rain, in the mud, for something to turn up. At home cold, hunger, misery stared them in the face. Who could wonder if they sought a little warmth and cheerfulness in the cafés and in the crowds ?

When at length Spring came and the sun shone once more, then hope filled the air ! The atmosphere changed at once. " Bolshevism will never flourish in Italy, never, never ! " exclaimed the Chief suddenly, as though revelation had come to him. " With this sunshine, it can never take root in our country—no, it will never flourish here ! "

CHAPTER XXXII

FASCISM

The Wave of Bolshevism—The Weapon of the Strike—The Fascio of Rome and of her Descendants—The Aristocracy of the Trenches.

THE earliest manifestation of Bolshevism in Italy occurred at Milan, on February 18th, 1919, four months after the Armistice, when our glorious victory had its wings clipped on the opposite shores of the Adriatic.

That manifestation was answered a month later, when, on 23rd of March, at the same place, there was held the first meeting of the "*Fasci*" (*fascia* = band which holds a bundle of faggots together). In a small hall of an old palace, hired for the occasion, there met together forty-five persons all told. Good, sound fellows for the most part, though of no particular ability or distinction. Amongst them all there were perhaps eight or nine well-known names.

Some people looked askance at this new development. The hens had hatched out an eagle and they looked with suspicion at the pinions of the newly-born.

Others, however, regarded the movement with the utmost enthusiasm, and adopted its tenets with the ardour of those who were ready to die for their faith. Alas! many were indeed called upon to lay down their lives! Many were to fall, giving their young lives, flowers of our race. The tragedy opened in 1919 at Florence and Dante's Arno had never seen a more terrible sight.

Followers multiplied in a miraculous way. These were the first Fascisti, though later on, most people tried to prove that from the outset they had been up-

holders of the new ideals. Mussolini, indeed, had in the end to set his face against such claims. Promotion in a revolutionary party ought to be strictly according to merit, not on the grounds of length of service. Therefore he prohibited the formation of the groups of 'Fascisti of 1919' which were attempted.

This effort of 1919, with all its shortcomings, was a beginning, an aspiration—above all, the means to an end. To fight and to serve was the ideal of its founder, a man whose whole being was bound up in the idea of service. The safety of Italy was at stake.

"Some tens of thousands of the proletariat," wrote Mussolini in the *Popolo*, "have marched through the streets of the indignant city, shouting *Viva Lenin!* It is no matter for surprise. These are the populace, the masses. They need a hero, they must have someone to believe in. For the old idols they must set up new ones. But we, as individualists, cannot bow down before the new gods. We cannot fail to criticize the creed of the new revelation and to refuse to bow before the Russian icons which the populace now adore. We are too conservative! Yes, we note the disdainful and superior smile of those who think they know everything. But we believe in the conservative instinct which holds by Western civilization, which clings to the rights of the individual, which upholds his freedom, freedom of the mind which does not live by head alone, freedom which can no more be crushed by the dictators from Russia than it was by the dictators of Prussian militarism.

"The society which Socialism holds up as a model to the deluded crowd is nothing but a revival of the barbarianisms of the eleventh century."

At this juncture of affairs the *Popolo* changed its sub-title. It was no longer called "The Socialist Daily," but the "Journal of the Fighters and the Producers." The editor, indeed, was not a man who could ever leave anything stationary, he always wished to change and advance with the times. His ideas constantly developed,

and more rapidly than ever in these few months. War had necessitated a complete revision of Socialist values in his mind. He swept away like old lumber many wrecked ideals and substituted for them one concrete reality, Italy.

In addition to the changes wrought by his personal experience of war, there was the profound influence of an even more important series of events. The world now saw in Russia a concrete example of Socialism put into practice, in favourable circumstances, in a country rich in resources and economically independent to a large extent of other nations, with vast stores of raw materials, with a population accustomed to obey the decrees of an autocratic government, and yet with some experience of collective action in the working of the "Mir" system. The population of that country was semi-Asiatic and therefore far removed from the unbridled individualism of the west. The genius of a Lenin, aided by men of first-rate ability such as Trotsky and Chicherin, had, nevertheless, in spite of the concentration of all power in their hands and the fact that they were undeterred by any scruples, not succeeded in causing the great Muscovite republic to revolve on a Marxian basis nor to advance by an inch the coming of the longed-for millennium.

This failure, coupled with the terrible bloodshed which went with it, constituted the true failure and tragedy of Bolshevism. That thousands had been executed, thousands more imprisoned, hundreds of thousands slain by famine might be justified from the point of view of history. It might appear that such sufferings were necessary and inevitable if the goal were to be reached. The *Popolo* summed the question up thus: "In Eastern Europe there existed a sinister power, standing for the negation of all human rights. The war has shaken it to its foundations, it has fallen. A dynasty which was the object of the veneration of millions has vanished from the horizon, like mist melting

before the sun. It does not matter if the new rulers employ the whip and the hangman's rope, what matters is the fact : the Romanoffs have fallen !

" The convulsions which rend the body of Russia may be, and it is to be hoped that they are, the birth-throes of a new and better order. . . . But in what direction is this evolution tending ? Not towards Socialism, that is certain. At the end of 1920 Lenin himself admitted : ' The economic basis for a true Socialist Republic does not yet exist.' Lenin continued : ' Communism is failing. Russian expectations are not towards communism, but towards capitalism. . . . The capitalist classes are advancing in serried ranks towards the promised land, destined to become in a few decades one of the greatest productive forces in the world.'"

No one followed the developments of Bolshevism more closely than Mussolini. When the great magnates and high officials did not consider the movement worth studying and dismissed it with a shrug of their shoulders, he declared, " It will last ! It will last ! It has lasted some time already ! " It is a delicate matter for idealistic demagogues to be obliged to face the fact that what seemed like a tyranny did not horrify him sufficiently to prevent him from seeing the other side, realizing as he did that a temporary suspension of liberty may in the end be productive of much good to a great nation. History shows that development is not always at an equal rate for different groups and different races.

Bolshevism arose in, and is confined to, Russia. Russia has adapted herself and her vital energies to its system, or perhaps the system has adapted itself to Russia. But can such a system be applied to Italy? Mussolini's reply was a definite " No."

If the unsubstantial and bloody illusion of Communism had only turned Russia towards the capitalist system—an irony of fate which history often shows us, as when Cromwell produced a Charles II and Napoleon a Louis XVIII—was it likely that Italy would abandon

her own ancient civilization with its proved benefits to follow the mirage of an alien Utopia ?

A conviction of this sort, in characters of his type, was calculated not to produce a state of passivity, but to lead immediately to the taking of certain resolutions. Mussolini gave himself to the task of showing up the Communist illusion, combating it foot by foot, pitting man against man, brain against brain, fighting both by action and by the spoken word, by propaganda, argument and " heavy artillery." It is necessary to insist on all he did in this respect, for now it is apt to be forgotten. Nor was the work of Fascism undertaken only in the interests of Italy. In the footsteps of Russia followed Roumania, Hungary, Poland ; the Bolshevist propaganda spread with alarming rapidity. If pestilence is in the air, it is no use to remain calm simply because so far it has not appeared in our home ! One should be grateful to one's neighbour who has disinfected his house, swept out every corner and fumigated throughout, so as to destroy every germ. Nations do not live in water-tight compartments, immune to the influence radiating from their neighbours. The danger to Europe was imminent and great. In preserving herself, Italy also saved England, Germany, France and even America from the dreaded infection.

And if a few " hard-heads " could be convinced by nothing else in the way of argument but by a tap on the head, the game was worth the candle. The game as played by the Fascisti only involved a few doses of castor oil and perhaps here and there a good cudgelling. The Russian tyranny had caused thousands and thousands of young men to lose even a life in which there no longer remained either joy or hope.

It must not be thought that " to fight Bolshevism " was the whole programme of Fascism. A general recognition existed of the fact that some sort of revolution was necessary for Italy. It was no longer possible for men to continue to breathe the old, stagnant, used-up air.

But the crux of the problem lay in this : How and in what way should such a revolution be shaped—in accordance with the spirit of the past or in keeping with that of the future ? The question was a serious one, for in all Italy the only man with the true temper of á revolutionary, the only man who could possibly be the leader of a revolution, was Mussolini !

When, in 1914, he had been expelled from the Socialist assembly of Milan, he had shouted defiantly, " You think you can turn me out, but you will find I shall come back again. I am and shall remain a Socialist, and my convictions will never change, they are bred in my very bones." It was true. Socialism, once adopted, is a mental attitude which is never lost. A very able man once said to me : " I do not believe in Collectivism nor in its ultimate aims, but its means are good and the important thing in life is not always the unrealizable ideal, but the tendency."

Mussolini laid down certain principles, which later were to become the basis of legislation under his rule.

" I do not intend to defend capitalism or capitalists," he wrote. " They, like everything human, have their defects. I only say that their possibilities of usefulness are not yet ended. Society has already assimilated some portion of Socialistic doctrines, which it has been able to adopt without evil results. . . . Capitalism has borne the monstrous burden of war and to-day still has the strength to shoulder the burdens of peace. . . . It is not simply and solely an accumulation of wealth, it is an elaboration, a selection, a co-ordination of values which is the work of centuries. Thus from the cold skies of Russia shine the pale stars of Communism—a doctrine which always appears in periods of great misery—and yet they call upon the names of Vanderbilt or Stinnes and put into practice the principles of what is known as capitalism. Many think, and I myself am one of them, that capitalism is scarcely at the beginning of its story. Immense tracts of Asia, Africa, even of America and

Australia are still undeveloped. Capitalism, spreading from Europe, will cover the whole world. The shoulders of the proletariat are not yet strong enough to bear the terrific burden of civilizing such areas. The proletariat must follow in the wake of the capitalists and at a given moment come to terms with them, dividing the spoils and sweeping aside all the parasites of both Right and Left who live on the margin of production."

And again, "State ownership! It leads only to absurd and monstrous conclusions: state ownership means state monopoly, concentrated in the hands of one party and its adherents, and that state brings only ruin and bankruptcy to all, labourers, townsmen, mankind. . . . This is a fact, proved by the experience of Russia, where State ownership produced a centralized tyranny. Property, after it has been nationalized, goes back into the hands of groups and individuals. Truly Socialism has a history full of paradox! The first Communist revolution, that of Russia, first proves its impotence and then turns society back on capitalism."

. . . . . .

If Communism has thus been shown to have failed as an ideal, the same bankruptcy has, owing to the war, overtaken the methods of democracy. Foresight and preparedness is an intellectual property which cannot be left to the mercy of mere numbers, but which necessitates a selection of individuals. This involves a contempt for parliamentarianism, for mere talking-machines, for electoral systems which give supremacy simply to numbers—and this contempt, though not new, has now become vastly stronger. Thus, for the first time, on the lips of all we find a growing use of the term "aristocracy." The first Fascists were an appeal to the aristocracy created by the war, one of fighters, of "men from the trenches," a reflection of the warlike superman of Nietzsche.

An American journal once gave the following explanation of the origin of the word "Fascism." It

declared that in Italy new-born infants are wrapped in swaddling bands, long pieces of stuff which are twisted right round them and which are called "*fascia*," and thus it said, "Every Italian baby is born a fascist."

In reality the word is derived from the "fasces" or bundles of sticks carried by the lictors of ancient Rome as symbols of authority.

The spiritually aristocratic nature of the movement is clearly demonstrated in the speech which its founder made in its first assembly. He began: "The assembly of March 23rd renders its homage first to the memory of the fallen, to the wounded and to those who fought for their country and for humanity, to all who declare themselves ready to throw themselves into the task of restoring social and moral order which will be undertaken by the associations of ex-soldiers.

"To-day we feel the greater in that we have chosen the path we mean to pursue. . . . The war has produced two good results, one negative, one positive. One negative in that it has prevented power being in the hands of the Hohenzollerns and the Hapsburgs; and one positive inasmuch as in no nation in the world is to be seen the triumph of reaction."

Secondly he announced: "The assembly of March 23rd declares itself opposed to the imperialism of other nations at the expense of Italy, and to the possibility of Italian Imperialism being used to the detriment of other nations, and accepts the postulate of the League of Nations which presupposes the full national development of each one of its members, a national development which in the case of Italy must be fulfilled on the Alps and the Adriatic, with the annexation of Fiume and Dalmatia.

"Other nations have their colonies, which they hold irrespective of any theories that may arise in different quarters. . . . Imperialism in reality is a principle of life for every expanding people. One form of Imperialism differs from another only in its means. The means we

shall choose will never be those of barbarism or brutality."

Finally he says : " In the next elections, whenever they take place, we must attack with every weapon we can muster those candidates who stand for neutrality in any of its forms. . . .

" I do not look on revolution as an eruption, or an epileptic fit. I consider it should have an aim and, above all, a method. . . . In 1913 I gave utterance to expressions which made the blood boil in the veins of some eminent Italian Socialists. I said : ' The proletariat needs a bath of blood ' It has had a bath of blood—one that has lasted three years. ' The proletariat needs a day of glory, a day to be remembered,' I said also. It has had a thousand such days. ' This mass needed weeding out, for many members have fallen away from their calling.' To-day no such purging is necessary. To-day we can assure ourselves that revolution is no longer a cause of terror to us because we are living actually in the middle of a revolution. . . . In the immense transformation which has come about we can either hasten or check advance. If the world moves too slowly we can accelerate its motion ; if it whirls too rapidly, we can put on the brake. To be a revolutionary in certain circumstances may be the glory of a life, but when those who talk of revolution are nothing but vandals and parasites, we must not hesitate to oppose them for fear of being called reactionaries.

" As to reaction and revolution, I have one unfailing standard which I apply. Everything which makes for the greatness of the Italian people I will support. Everything which tends to lower the Italian people I will oppose."

These words and conceptions show an attitude of mind which must be considered aristocratic in the best, most spiritual sense—an attitude which is based entirely on high moral principles. On all sides others had failed. Socialist unity was destroyed and even more completely had international Socialism gone under. Communism

had failed and with it the Soviet system of Moscow. Alike the clerical party, the timid conservatives, the democrats and the republicans, all had suffered defeat and eclipse.

The Socialists indeed were able to boast of the immense number of voters they hoped to rally at the polls. But the founder of Fascism was not dismayed. "No ! no !" he exclaimed, settling his hat more firmly on his head with a blow of his fist : "I will not accept their dominance. The masses ought to be educated, not flattered and played upon by demagogues. We must stand as educators, who do not seek success or popularity or salaries or votes. The figures of the Socialist numbers are staggering, but they are only figures, and they represent only the enormous weight of a prehistoric pachyderm without a soul."

"Nor," he went on, "would the charlatans who added the hope of Paradise to their promises succeed. Don Sturzo, the little long-nosed Sicilian priest of genius might well talk of Paradise. He would accomplish nothing on earth !"

CHAPTER XXXIII

FIUME

The Printing Offices of the *Avanti* burnt down—Mussolini on the Problem of Fiume—12th September, 1919—The Intervention of d'Annunzio—Secret Documents—The Poet and the Orator.

I REMEMBER during the general strike looking one day down the deserted Corso. There I saw, coming down the street, a little band of men, advancing four abreast. The man at their head was holding a blood-stained helmet in his hand, some of them carried charred poles and pieces of wood. It was a band of Fascisti coming back after having burnt the printing offices of the *Avanti*. They had not injured any of the printers or the revolutionary workpeople, but they had destroyed the whole of the machinery and all the furniture in the building.

We had begun our offensive. The day was the 15th of April, 1919.

. . . . . .

In talking to an American journalist, Mussolini thus summed up his views : " We are all agreed over Fiume. Fiume is entirely Italian, in language and in population. Over Dalmatia we are not unanimous. Dalmatia has a mixed population and is bilingual. Sentiment and history combine with strategical reasons to give the culture of the little towns, formerly Venetian and purely Italian, precedence over that of the country-side which is not civilized at all. The question is not one of mere numbers, but of civilization." The whole matter was clearly stated in these few words.

Italy was in a troubled condition in those days. The revolutionary propaganda had produced its effects. The

populace had become rude and insulting in its behaviour towards the bourgeoisie, even in the streets and on the trams.

Strikes were perpetual. For a mere nothing work would be brought to a standstill. What work was done was of the most superficial and slovenly character. On the merest pretext appeals would be made "to the solidarity of the workers." The country was in as bad a plight as the towns. Soldiers were spat at, officers were followed by insulting crowds, simply because they were in uniform. They were attacked, wounded, forced to fly to shelter, to barricade themselves in the cafés. Wound-stripes were torn off the arms of wounded men and medals were trampled under foot.

Parliament was paralysed and incapable of taking strong action. The Government tried to conciliate the Socialists and win them over. Three separate amnesties were given to all deserters, even to those who had deserted in face of the enemy. The attacks on men in uniform were met by a circular, issued by the Minister for War, advising the men not to wear uniform, but to go out in mufti so as to avoid giving provocation.

The darkest hour comes before the dawn. On September 12th, 1919, Gabriele d'Annunzio gave up his aeroplane trip from Rome to Tokyo. He assembled a band of followers at Ronchi, near Gorizia, crossed the frontier and occupied Fiume.

Instantly the *Popolo* rallied to his side. Fascism understood at once the immense importance of the action he had taken. The Government, on the other hand, officially repudiated the poet.

By his advance from Ronchi, not only Fiume was secured, but through Fiume, Italy. Fiume was like the little leaven, which leaveneth the whole lump. D'Annunzio himself expressed this idea in his Statute of Quarnaro, pages aflame with love of virtue and justice, of ardent aspiration towards the ideal, like a vision of Isaiah put into modern prose. The spark of patriotism

lit at Fiume sprang up into a flame which swept through Italy. Fiume, with her glorious Commander and his legions, was the beacon on the Adriatic to which all eyes turned. From the plain of Lombardy it was answered by the beacon of the *Popolo* and from one to other flashed the words of hope and glory.

"The *Commandante* is a great poet and I admire him with all my heart," said Mussolini. And the one set himself to fulfil, in the domain of reality, the ideas put forward by the other in his exalted prose.

The subscription "For Fiume" filled columns of the *Popolo*. Fiery articles attacked the line taken by the Government and covered it with ridicule. The Government dared do nothing against the Editor, though it had him shadowed, in case he too should wish to go to Fiume.

On October 9th, at a Fascist meeting at Florence, Mussolini, before beginning his speech, begged for indulgence as he had not had much time in which to prepare it. He had but that moment come from Fiume, whither he had gone by aeroplane to confer with d'Annunzio. His speech, none the less, was one of great importance, for in it he laid down the basis of the most original creation of Fascism, the scheme for syndicates of agrarian and industrial workers. It was a scheme which, while in its aim rather of a Socialist and Collectivist colour, was yet in its methods purely aristocratic and based entirely on the community of national interests. No concessions were made to the mob, no appeal to the so-called "true working-man." "I do not tell you, O people, that you are as gods. As I love you truly, so I should say to you that you are dirty, you must arise and cleanse yourselves; you are ignorant, therefore set yourselves to gain instruction. . . . Horny hands are not enough to prove a man capable of guiding a State. . . . You can make a revolution in twenty-four hours, but you cannot in that time create a new social order for a nation which is part of a world order. You must not,

however, mistake us for a kind of body-guard of the bourgeoisie, which, in so far as it consists of profiteers, is utterly vile and contemptible. These people must defend themselves, we will not defend them.

"We shall defend the nation, the people as a whole. We shall work for the moral and material welfare of the people. And I believe that with our policy we shall be able to make the masses one with the nation."

It was necessary to show the Socialists that he was not afraid of them. No one was to be able to boast that the Fascisti dared not appear openly in the streets. It was decided to hold an open-air meeting, in the evening. The place chosen was the Piazza Belgiojioso. A platform with a few seats was erected there, up against the wall of the house where Manzoni lived and died. The Piazza itself is a corner of old Milan, surrounded by the gardens which back on to public offices. The fame of the orator, combined with curiosity, brought all the city to the meeting. Mussolini appeared, like one of the ancient tribunes on his rostrum, his figure lit by the light of torches which some of his followers carried. His pose and that of his adherents recalled memories of the war so clearly that it seemed strange to see that the street lights were no longer dimmed for fear of air raids.

The very voice of the orator seemed warlike in its clear notes,* warm in tone, never strident, but strong and carrying far. In the great piazza not one syllable was missed. By the red flickering light of the torches he looked down on the vast crowd gazing at him wonder-struck. "I don't agree with his ideas, but he's a brave man, he's not afraid anyway"—that was the kind of comment one heard.

Mussolini's courage undoubtedly impressed the populace. He had bearded the lions in their den and they did not hurt him. Perfect order prevailed, followed by applause which grew ever louder.

* "One of the most beautiful I have ever heard," writes Lady Oxford, describing Mussolini's voice.

The applause, however, did not portend that he was gaining over votes in the coming elections. Few indeed voted for him, though amongst them were intellectuals who had never thought of meddling in politics, yet who felt it their duty now to come to the help of one who was struggling against great odds to uphold the banner of the spirit.

The total bulk of the votes given for him might all have been contained in one of the funeral urns which the ancients laid in their tombs.

Milan mocked him. Crowds paraded before the houses of noted Fascisti and chiefly before that of Mussolini, singing and bawling sham "litanies for the dead."

But he was to rise again.

CHAPTER XXXIV

AN INTERLUDE

Mussolini Arrested—His "Rest Cure"—His Plays—Aviation—"Live Dangerously."

TWO days after the elections I was with the Editor in his "den," discussing the situation with him. Perquisitions, searchings, arrests were becoming frequent. Mussolini was warned by many friends that he would do well to fly. He laughed at the idea. "They know where I am, let them come and find me, I shan't run away." Suddenly a commissioner of police was announced. He showed Mussolini an official notice. Mussolini came to me and held out his hand. "Goodbye, Signora! I am arrested." The chief reporter of the *Popolo* burst forth indignantly to me, "So this is how they treat the man who saved Italy after Caporetto!" The excitement was intense. The offices of the Fascisti were searched, many arrests made—the poet Marinetti was among those arrested. The charges brought were grave. Complicity in the affairs of Fiume was called "armed plotting against the security of the State." The next day the *Popolo* came out with enormous headlines across its front page, "Benito Mussolini, guilty of having defended Italy after Caporetto, has been thrown into prison." Nitti, however, dared not proceed further. After the arrest, he was frightened at the storm he had raised. The next day Mussolini was released.

All these disturbances had a very bad effect on Mussolini's nerves. He lived at too high pressure, worn

by the constant strain of editing the paper, conducting the political campaign of the Fascisti, and organizing propaganda throughout Italy. His activities were innumerable, and he added to them by all sorts of fantastic occupations. Every day the courtyard resounded with the click of crossed swords, his daily fencing lesson. Next, he took up motoring and obtained a driver's certificate. Then he learnt to fly. And all this while he was writing five articles a week for the paper.

In the depressing days after his electoral defeat and arrest, he worked harder than ever at the paper. He stuck to his task, undismayed, untiring. I think he never worked harder, nor with a greater zest for life. I might almost say he enjoyed that rude time of struggle. Later, in more prosperous days, he may even have looked back with regret to the strenuous times of the past. "It is necessary," he once said, "to have one's mind always attuned to change. . . . One may go from a hut to a palace provided one is always ready to go back from the palace to the hut."

He lived in no danger of stagnating. When there was nothing in the way of strikes, demonstrations, threatened attacks, to occupy him, he would find himself confronted by some unexpected incident, such as a duel.

Sometimes, the reaction from these states of feverish activity left him in a condition of inertia and indifference. "To-day I feel as if I had no will. I only ask to obey orders. It was good, in one sense, to be in the trenches, like a straw blown by the wind! Corporal Mussolini for water fetching! For distribution of rations! For distribution of munitions! If anyone wishes to command me in any way I shall be happy to carry out any orders." And he would employ his energies in showing how lacking in energy he felt—for the space of five minutes!

From these days of physical reaction he would find

relief in the exercise of his imagination. Thus he planned out a work, to be called " Myth and Heresy," for which he made notes in a little pocket-book, and he also talked of various possible subjects for plays. I do not know how far he ever got with anything in this connection, but he would sometimes talk of the scenes, characters and dialogues he had planned. Two plays I know were to be of a Grand Guignol type ; one was a tragedy, for Mussolini's dramatic ideas were not of the gay and cheerful variety.

He was really very much taken up by his dramatic schemes. A short time after the sinister Matteotti affair, which caused him such terrible suffering that for a while his life seemed completely wrecked, I met him going out one day, looking more cheerful. He showed me a packet of manuscript, which he told me was his new play, with which he had succeeded in distracting his mind when in need of relaxation from his worries and troubles. It was a play based on life in the Campagna, and this man, tired, exhausted, worn out by his bitter experiences, had found refreshment in recalling the incidents of his childhood.

Meanwhile, his aviation made great progress. He was on the point of getting his pilot's licence. His fellow-workers regarded this with disapproval. " He has no right to risk his life in this way," they complained. And then came an accident. He was bruised, but no limbs were broken. The aeroplane was damaged, and nothing infuriated him more than any suggestion that the crash had been his fault. His instructor came to see him as he was recovering from his injuries, and it could be seen that, while the instructor thought the novice had been too bold, the novice thought that the instructor had been too cautious. He enjoyed his recovery, though by sheer force of will he got up and was back at work while everyone thought he was still confined to bed. I found him looking out of his office window at the sun and the new green shoots of spring. " Life is

very beautiful. It is worth risking it, it is necessary to risk one's life in order to know how much one enjoys it." he said.

"Live dangerously," the motto of Nietzsche, he was to cite later, in a tragic moment, in August, 1924.

CHAPTER XXXV

THE COMING OF VICTORY

Talk of the Dictatorship of the Proletariat—Lenin on Mussolini—Trotsky's Opinion—A Tragedy—Albania, the Lost Land—A Sign—The Elections of 1921.

TWILIGHT was filling the streets of the city. April was in the air and mingled with April's scents was the tumult of the "Red Flag."

Everyone was full of the Dictatorship of the Proletariat during those early months of 1920. The people, enraged at the high cost of living, were still further inflamed by the Socialist leaders' talk of profiteers, speculators and the feebleness of the Government. Much that they said was true, but strikes did not avail to lower the cost of living. The lira fell until it was only worth a quarter of its pre-war value.

No one seemed capable of resisting the populace. Many of the bourgeoisie seemed to fear their fellow-countrymen more than they feared the foreigner.

In the Chamber a deputy, Misiano, who had been a deserter from the army, and a hundred and fifty-six of his companions sang the "Red Flag" while the King was entering to open the session. The Fascisti, however, fell upon him and he had to apply for the protection of the police whom he had so frequently vilified.

It was the period when "starving Austria and Germany" filled the world with their complaints and the Socialists took in Viennese children and gave them hospitality in the public institutions. The *Popolo* organized hospitality for children nearer at home, children of Fiume whose parents had been ruined because they were pro-Italian.

No doubt if the Communists had had at their head a good leader, they might have won over the great mass of labourers and workpeople and dragged in their wake the Socialists and reformers of the Confederation of Labour.

I do not go so far as to say that the " Dictatorship of the Proletariat " could have lasted in Italy. Under the pressure of the material conditions of the people, it would probably have collapsed eventually in a sea of blood. But for the moment any resistance to it would have been of the slightest and it could easily have seized the reins of power. It is useless, however, to speculate on what might have been. Mussolini's chief asset is his severe realism, his insistence on obedience and his willingness to take risks—all qualities which are the exact opposite of the unbridled adulation and the grasping, pleasure-loving policy of others.

Lenin knew this and remarked : " Mussolini ? A great pity he is lost to us ! He is a strong man, who would have led our party to victory." These were his words in addressing a deputation of Italian Socialists who visited Russia in 1919 and 1920.

Trotsky spoke in the same vein : " You have lost your trump card ; the only man who could have carried through a revolution was Mussolini."

Exactly one year after d'Annunzio had occupied Fiume, the Socialists seized the factories, September, 1920. They expelled the owners, the engineers, even the technical experts from many places. In a few cases they held the owners and their families as hostages. They set up " committees of workmen," after the Soviet pattern and the " Dictatorship of the Proletariat " was attempted on a large scale.

Yet Giolitti refused to grasp the situation and remained set on peaceful methods of persuasion. " Let the workers see for themselves how difficult it is to conduct an industry ! " he said. " Let them find from experience how bad is the state of trade ! Let them run

their heads up against economic laws ! Besides, our troops are all needed to protect the public buildings, we cannot scatter them all over the country."

Owners sought protection for their factories in vain. Small bodies of troops could not even make their way through the tumultuous streets. The authorities stood by and watched the forces of usurpation.

In the height of a glorious summer, the news of a terrible tragedy flared from Turin throughout Italy. Sentence was given against the student Sonzini, found guilty of *fascismo* and against the gaoler Scimula, similarly accused. In vain did Scimula appeal to the evidence of his good character, to the fact that he had an excellent record for kindness, especially to political prisoners ; in vain did he beg for justice in the name of his mother and his children. Both men were condemned to death by the Soviet which had set itself up as a tribunal of justice. They were to have been thrown alive into the great furnaces of the metal works, but the furnaces, without the technicians to keep them up, had gone out. The two were therefore shot with revolvers. " These," commented the *Avanti*, " are the risks run by those who think to fight for Fascism."

Meanwhile, what was happening to the army ? Military revolt had appeared in several places. The men took their officers prisoner and disarmed them. In Ancona, in order to subdue the rebellious garrison, it was actually necessary to bombard the city.

Albania, which had cost us such sacrifices, was abandoned, together with Valona. The sufferings of our men, the fevers caught during the campaigns, the work done by the submarines in transporting troops, the toils of those who had covered that country with a network of roads, the long marches endured by the soldiers of Italy, often on insufficient rations, with little water to drink, all were thrown away. Albania, the lost land ! . . .

" When one sets foot on the road of renunciation," wrote the *Popolo* in these days of July, 1920, " it is

difficult to call a halt, especially when one's opponents interpret every act as due to weakness, and put down as cowardice what may be merely conciliation. The exhibition of weakness shown since last November by both Government and people is not the best method of preventing armed conflict. . . . Except for the torch which d'Annunzio keeps burning, the whole of Italy, bourgeoisie and proletariat, the governing and the governed, is covered with ignominy."

At Bologna, the head-quarters of Socialism, four Fascisti succeeded in being elected to the municipal council. At their inaugural session, one of these Fascisti, Giordani, who had been badly wounded in the war, was killed by the hail of missiles thrown at him. Two others were wounded. A month later, at Ferrara, the tumult provoked by the Socialists ended in the death of six or eight of the Fascisti.

But at Bologna, when Giordani was slain, his companion, Oviglio, coolly laid on the seat beside him a loaded revolver : " Kill me if you wish, I will not shoot an Italian." This gesture stood for the new spirit of Italy, for the new national conscience.

. . . . . .

We come to a sad and memorable day, Christmas, 1920. News had to be sent to the editor of the *Popolo*, to the supporter of the ideals of d'Annunzio, that the beacon of the Adriatic had been extinguished in blood. Fiume had been taken and evacuated, the *Commandante* had been wounded, and, brother fighting against brother, forty legionaries had fallen at the hands of their brother-soldiers of Italy.

Though wretched and troubled, Mussolini at once recognized the bitter needs of the hour. The Treaty of Rapallo, provisional as all treaties are, was yet capable of improvement, like all human things. Now that the State had decided, now that the nation was pledged, it was necessary to accept the position. Five weeks after these events, Mussolini said in an important speech :

"Let no one reproach me because I have not made that little, easy, cheerful, pleasant thing called 'a revolution' . . . The Fascisti have never promised to make a revolution in Italy, in the event of Fiume being attacked . . . I, personally, have never written to d'Annunzio to make him believe that revolution in Italy depended on my inclinations. I do not 'bluff' nor talk 'hot air.'"

He explained clearly the theory of revolution which later he was to put into practice. A revolution, above all things, should have a mind of its own, clearly defined; only with clear ideas could the populace be won over. It should have a precise objective, a programme already laid down, so that in the hour of victory it would not fail through dissensions.

"Revolution is not a 'surprise-packet' which can be opened at will. I do not carry it in my pocket. . . . Revolution will be accomplished with the army, not against the army; with arms, not without them; with trained forces, not with undisciplined mobs called together in the streets. It will succeed when it is surrounded by a halo of sympathy by the majority, and if it has not that, it will fail."

After the day of tragedy, his far-seeing brain caused him to view the future with hope. "D'Annunzio and his legions, never surrendering, are the glory of our stock," he said to me. "They are not called 'iron-heads' for nothing. Perhaps one should also admit that Giolitti has an iron head too, since he will not give way either. It is necessary, I know, to enforce respect for the Treaty, once it has been accepted by the State and recognized by the nation. It is a terrible clash between reasons of State and ideals!"

In the *Popolo* he gave this warning: "The legions of Ronchi, who to-day are being dispersed into all the corners of Italy, obey, departing into the night away from the shores of Fiume because of these principles: liberty and justice. They undertook their enterprise in the cause of liberty, since Fiume is to be trampled down

by the policy of England and handed over to the Croats : it was an enterprise of sovereign justice because it strove to prevent the committing of a great wrong. . . . Their action was a superb defiance of the world ; it has proved that besides official Italy, entangled in tortuous negottiations, there is another Italy, a warlike Italy which will not be attached to the triumphal car of successful plutocracy. For fifteen months the attention of the whole world has been riveted on this little rebel city. . . . I see d'Annunzio before me in my imagination, and beside him stand the souls of the forty soldiers who have fallen and I take them to my heart. These are the last to fall in the Great War and, like the rest, not in vain ! . . . These dead prove that Fiume and Italy are one, one flesh and blood, and that the dark forces of diplomacy will never succeed in divorcing those who are for ever sealed by blood.

" All honour to the Legion of Ronchi, to its leader, to the living who return and the dead who will return no more."

On the 3rd of March, 1924, Mussolini was to sign the treaty of annexation whereby Fiume was joined to the kingdom of Italy !

Gabriele d'Annunzio was created Prince of Nevose. The founder of the *Popolo* was made a Knight of the Collar of the Annunciation, which gave him the prerogatives of a member of the Royal Family.

. . . . . .

The evil auguries of Christmas, 1920, cast their shadows on to the new year 1921.

Every evening the sound of firing would be heard in the cities of Italy. As night fell, it became continuous and, driven away from one district, the bands would collect in another. The value of property destroyed ran into millions and the loss on the railways was almost incalculable.

That winter, the usual rhythm was to be violently

interrupted. One evening I saw people running. A bomb had been thrown, wounding one passer-by and two more had been thrown but had not exploded. A few evenings later, another bomb was put in front of a well-known restaurant. One day in February, while I was giving tea to some friends, the cup fell from my hand, the windows rattled and the house rocked as if it would collapse. We ran to the windows. All was deserted. After a moment or two of that deadly stillness which precedes a storm, a crowd of apparent madmen came running down the street, gesticulating, dragging themselves along, in absolute silence, without cries, voiceless, as though they had been stricken dumb in the dark abyss from whence they fled. Cries followed later, when—first one by one, then two, then ten at a time—came the terrible procession of cars bearing wounded and dead through the streets of the horror-struck city. A plot of the Communists had filled the pit of the popular theatre of Diana with dead and wounded, massacring the audience who were listening to an operetta. Amongst the gilding and bronze and velvet were scattered fragments of flesh, pieces of limbs, mutilated bodies and blood and brains bespattering the whole place.

Seventeen coffins were borne through terror-struck Milan. On the steps of the Duomo the Cardinal-Archbishop Ratti—now Pope Pius XI—stood with his clergy, in his robes, giving absolution and blessing to the corpses as they were borne before him in turn. Behind him from the open doors the church shed forth a mystic glow of light and of hymns.

The Fascisti companies, drawn up in military formation, made their first public appearance on this solemn occasion. Each troop had its leaders, its name, and its banner. They passed along, orderly and quiet—"The Nazario Sauro, the Cesare Battisti, the Mussolini, the Intrepid, the Enrico Toti, the Company of the Carroccio, the Company of the Dead," names renowned

in war, names sacred in the history of yesterday and of to-day.

Alone, on foot, at the head of all, marched the Chief, his face set, so alone, so upright in his martial bearing, that in the midst of the crowd he seemed as if he were on horseback. It was impossible to avoid thinking of that other Condottiere, upright on his bronze horse in one of the great squares of Venice, Colleoni.

The crowd gazed only at him. A quiver of expectation and emotion ran before him, far more moving than applause. Behind him swelled forth loud cries of acclamation which followed his triumphal way along the entire route.

A rumour flew through the crowd which filled the piazza that a woman had been fallen upon and killed. There was a sudden wave of terror that bombs were to be thrown, or that a fusillade of musketry would break out. Panic seized on vast masses and might have led to the most terrible disasters, but a glance from the Chief, and a word of command to the ranks of Fascisti, instantly stopped it and the tumult was quelled. Thus symbolically the discipline of the volunteers, obedient to an idea, dominated chaos, creature of selfishness and of fear.

Two months later, 16th May, 1921, the political elections all over Italy resulted in complete triumph. The Socialists could not believe their eyes. So many who had thought their seats safe lost them. The leader of the Fascisti was not only elected for Milan, but also for Bologna and Ferrara—the law allowed only two candidatures. Both sent him to the Chamber with that avalanche of votes which he had foreseen two years before. He was now the leader of a Parliamentary group which had sprung from nothing to thirty-three members. The battle of the polls neither depressed him when defeated nor exalted him when he was victorious.

Observers who were either interested persons, or sceptics, were always saying that Mussolini and Fascism

were exhausted, without vitality, done for, spent, buried. Let the facts speak for themselves.

" Is this new, young, vigorous, ardent, heroic movement finished ? " Mussolini had asked at Bologna just before the election. " I myself, who claim the paternity of this child of mine, which abounds so with life, I myself sometimes feel that the movement has already burst beyond the modest confines I had assigned to it. . . . We are on the eve of the election. Well, do you not feel that the rudder of State will never be given back into the hands of the old men of the old Italy . . . used and abused, tired and even worse than tired ? This Fascism is the wind of all the heresies knocking at all the closed doors. It says to the old priests, who are more or less like mutes at a funeral : Fly from those storms which threaten your ruin ! And we say to all, great men and small men of the political sphere, we say : Make way for the youth of Italy, which wishes to impose its faith and its passion. And if you will not make way voluntarily, you will be swept away by our ' punitive expedition,' which will unite in one bond all the free spirits of the nation."

Electoral triumph had come overwhelmingly. More remained to be accomplished.

CHAPTER XXXVI

HIERARCHY

The Order of the Great Umbrella—The "Enemy of the Rose"—The Pact—Concrete Problems—Hierarchy—Berlin and Angora—The Episode of Corfu—The State and Fascism—A Non-neutral Government.

WHEN he belonged to the official body of Socialists, the revolutionary leader had said, at a Congress: "Men are nothing, they disappear—only ideas remain."

The sovereign importance of man had now, however, been hammered into his mind on the forge of experience. He tried in vain to render Fascism impersonal, detaching it from his personality by means of fresh ordinances, changes of the constitution and distribution of responsibility over a wider area; but the attachment of this great body of men to the one man remained invincible. Even the enemy thought of him alone; the whole responsibility rested on him. Once he assumed that responsibility, he insisted on obedience. "Do you know who I am? The founder and inventor of the order of the Great Umbrella, the universal protector!" he exclaimed with sarcastic irritation when he was begged to intervene and correct the mistakes of others and to put things right by throwing his personal authority into the balance.

One of the earliest crises arose in June, 1921, over the "republican tendency" which divided the party. At that time the imprudent and ill-considered actions of the Government seemed to threaten the prestige of the Crown itself. The intention of the Soldier-King to be poor amongst those who were poor, to give to his fellow-combatants his splendid mansions and historic

villas, was full of beautiful idealism. But a saint cannot deprive himself of his halo in order to make it into bread.

" Why are we Republicans ? In one sense because we see a King who is not enough of a monarch . . . all would become grey, mediocre, flat. Everything is done to attenuate, to hide, to diminish the authority of the State . . . and the democracy does not understand that the masses despise those who have not the courage to be that which they ought to be." So affirmed this real man of the people.

An even more acute crisis arose in August, 1921, by reason of a pact agreed to between Fascists, Socialists and Populars, against violence.

Faced by the intolerable pretensions of some groups which were not sufficiently held in check by their local chiefs, Mussolini's warning broke forth with bitter reproach :

" The nation turned to us when our movement appeared as a liberator from a tyranny ; the nation will turn against us if our movement takes on the guise of a fresh tyranny. . . . The nation needs peace in order to recover, to restore itself, to fulfil its highest destinies. You do not understand, you do not wish to understand, that the country wishes to work without being disturbed. I would enter into alliance at this moment with the devil himself, with Anti-Christ, if that would give this poor country five years of tranquillity, of restoration, of peace "—I heard him utter these words with glittering eyes, accompanying them with a blow on the table.

When, after endless negotiations, the pact in question was ready for signature, at the last moment some of the subordinate officials rebelled against it. Confronted with their opposition, Mussolini declared that he would go back " into the rank and file."

" From my point of view, the situation is absolutely clear : if Fascism will not follow me, no one can oblige me to follow Fascism. I understand and sympathize a little with those Fascisti who cannot get away from their

own surroundings. They stand for that love of one's own home town which is really opposed to us, to us who wish to centralize Italy and make her into one national entity, fused into one whole from the sea to the Alps. But the man who has founded and guided a movement, who has given it the fine flower of his energy, has the right to proceed from the study of a thousand local elements to a synthetic consideration of the political and moral panorama ; he has the right to see from a mountain top a wider horizon, a panorama which is not that of Bologna, or Venice, or Cuneo, but is Italian, European, world-wide. . . . I am a leader who leads, not a leader who follows. I go—now and above all—against the current and never abandon myself to it and I watch always, above all, for the changing winds to swell the sails of my destiny."

The minds of men were too heated and irritated ; the words of civil peace and toleration, listened to by men of goodwill in both camps, found but few followers amongst the mob. But ' the pact ' served to destroy the legend of violence for the sake of violence at all costs, an end in itself. It achieved even more important results, in that it showed the need for a hierarchy in Fascism and demonstrated clearly the principle, " A hierarchy ought to culminate in a pin's point," as the President would declare, taught by the varied experience of these two or three years spent in what he called " the office of the Great Umbrella " before he assumed the post which was awaiting him, that of *Il Duce*—the Chief.

For Fascism, new and greater rôles were indicated. No longer was it a movement of reaction against Bolshevism, with a limited and sterile programme of negation and opposition, it now became a movement of expansion. It ceased to be local and became national, and in passing beyond the nation became an active element in the life of the whole world.

. . . . . .

Discussions of a theoretical nature were not possible

in a daily newspaper, owing to lack of space and to the popular nature of a journal meant to pass into the hands of all sorts of people. Still less could a daily paper, meant for active propaganda, such as the *Popolo*, serve the purposes of deeper study, of more concrete culture, which the founder desired for Fascism.

Hence, for these reasons, he always thought with longing of *Utopia*, his ancient review. He is made like that : he would suddenly give up one of his creations, but he would always come back to it. Fickle and yet constant, after twists and turns he would come back to his old ways enriched by experience. " We will have a review—you shall see ! I have it all planned out." We sought for a title. One day, amongst other ideas, *Gerarchia*—" Hierarchy "—was suggested. He pounced on it like a cat on a mouse—" That will do, that will do."

" The idea of publishing a review which should announce its programme in its title, while that programme should itself be a challenge, arose at the end of 1920, when the times were particularly stormy and the future seemed uncertain. The fact that its circulation greatly exceeded that of any other political review points to the conclusion that it gave expression to the spiritual tendencies of the new generation, illustrating them and inspiring them."

In the closing part of 1917, Mussolini had written in the *Popolo :* " Revolution is a discipline which substitutes itself for another discipline, it is an order, a hierarchy, which takes the place of another order."

He expressed his views even more clearly in the first number of the Review :

" He who talks of ' hierarchy ' means a scale of human values ; he who talks of a scale of human values means a scale of responsibility and duties ; he who talks of ' hierarchy ' means discipline. Above all, he who talks of ' hierarchy ' in reality takes up a fighting position against all those who tend—in spirit or in life—to lower

or destroy the necessary ranks of society. 'Necessary,' I call them, not merely traditional. Tradition is certainly one of the greatest spiritual forces of the people in so far as it is a continued and constant creation of their minds. But we cannot accept the absolute test that all which is traditional is sacred, immutable and inviolable : such as the traditional hierarchy. History offers a panorama of hierarchies which rise, live, are transformed, decline, die. It is necessary, therefore, to preserve the values of the hierarchies which have not exhausted their usefulness ; to graft on to the trunk of such hierarchies new elements of life ; to prepare the way for new hierarchies. And in this way we shall solder the links between past and future.

" We do not mean to repudiate the past. We should repudiate ourselves. We are already the past, since we live in the present and face those who are to come ; nor do we mean to cut ourselves off from the life of the future, since our present is in itself a future faced with those who have gone before us. . . . Confronted by the words and ideas which bind us together, Left bound to Right, conservatives to revolutionaries, tradition to progress, we do not cling desperately to the past, as to our only hope of salvation, nor do we hurl ourselves headlong into the tempting clouds of the future. Our philosophical and political position is that of a watchful control, of a meditative discipline, bent on determining a synthesis or state of equilibrium which will enable us to emerge from the stormy sea of the world crisis."

This " stormy sea " had to be known and appreciated, not only in its effects on our little shores. It was the overwhelming importance of international problems which caused Mussolini, when he became ruler, to set aside an immemorial tradition and combine the post of President of the Council and Minister for Foreign Affairs. I heard him say :

" You ought to see me busy with the affairs of Europe, you ought to see me busy over the position of

Italy in Europe and in the world, and you think I can throw myself heart and soul into the squabbles of the Fascisti of Tradate !

" Italy is bottled up in the Adriatic, a little bowl of water one could wash one's face in. Compared with the problems of world politics, that of the Mediterranean is but a small affair, a little overflow from two oceans. Yet I cannot take up the question because I am called to attend to the contest at Peretola, or because there have been blows struck at Gorgonzola or Roccannuccia, someone has been killed, all Italy can think of nothing else, Fascism is entirely absorbed in the matter! "

And he wrote :

" I hold that having broken the pride, which was one not of words alone, of Italian Bolshevism, Fascism ought to become the watchful guardian of our foreign policy. I think that Fascism ought to train up a generation of new men, without provincialism or local feeling, who would " feel " the Italian problem, who would hold it to be a problem of self-consciousness, of expansion, of Italian prestige, in Europe and in the world, and, to attain this object, would adapt both minds and methods. If Italy wishes to play a guiding part in the destinies of the world, if Italy has the pride which she ought to have, she should prepare herself now; she should assemble a band of technical experts, of students who would bring both devotion and efficiency to the examination of special questions, and at the same time she ought to awaken amongst the great mass of Italians an interest in foreign policy. Only by these means can Italy become a great nation, and, what is even more important, while presenting herself to the outside world as one united and complete whole, preserve and safeguard her political unity at home. . . . It is necessary to force Fascism to change its front and to turn it away from bitter local quarrels in order that it may become the motive power of our foreign policy. A hard and ungrateful task, but a necessary one. Either Fascism will become this, or

else, its warfare against Bolshevism being brought to an end for want of enemies, Fascism will cease to have any object."

At this period, Mussolini wrote for *Gerarchia* his studies on "The Drama of Cannes," on "The Masks and Faces of Germany," and later on "The Crescent Moon." They seem to-day, even more than when they were written, prophetically realistic, so closely did they probe the problem of the Franco-British conflict and of the alarming reappearance of German activity, behind which lay the shadow of a Russian alliance.

"The memory of man is short," he said. "Few are quick to remember that France has twice been invaded by the Germans. Few are ready to believe that a third attempt is amongst the possibilities of the future. In the universal misery, in the universal effort of Europe to emerge from this period of uncertainty, France has been judged as the last factor which disturbs the settlement of Europe, as the only militaristic nation of the world. No one reflects that, if the Treaty of Versailles were torn up, France would have only her guns to depend upon. All are ready to believe in the Pan-European idealism of Lloyd George. The English world follows an optimistic conception of the future of Europe; the French world has a conception of the most pessimistic kind. The Germany of to-morrow, thickly populated and prolific, inflamed with rancour and agitated by old dreams of power which have never been dispelled, the Germany of to-morrow, leader of Russia, which she has already begun to colonize, will she ever adapt herself to existence on an equality in that Concert of Europe which can be discerned as the ultimate object behind all the oratorical outbursts of Lloyd George? . . .

"The violent revision of the Treaty of Sèvres has led . . . to a war of 'periphrasis,' which has made all Europe tremble," Mussolini wrote in another article in *Gerarchia* in September, 1922. "Other violent revisions may plunge Europe into another war. Behind Germany,

materially disarmed, but spiritually armed, Russia may appear. Luckily, if England is unarmed, or practically so, France has an army and Italy has an army, possibly two. The moral of the Kemalist victory is this: Europe to put herself on her feet again, needs at least fifty years of peace. This half-century of peace might have been given by a military peace. It was not so given because the Wilson mentality prevented it. For lack of the peace given by the sword, we must do what we can, within the limits of possibility, for a peace of approximate justice. Either we do this or we shall have another war, and with another war the collapse of European civilization. This is the dilemma which is to be seen in Anatolia, lit up by the flames from burning Smyrna."

Certainly one source of strength in the English is to be found in the fact that the vast bulk of the middle classes occupy themselves very little with politics, but there is a general and widely-diffused political consciousness, which is based upon principles that are deeply rooted in the hearts of the people, and once a decision has been arrived at in favour of one or other of these historic principles, the people leave to their leaders the charge and responsibility of putting them into practice. One man thinks for all in public matters. The millions of citizens control him in essentials, and for the rest follow him and support him, from a distance; they know they can depend on him in their turn; they can rid themselves, if they wish, of the burden of public affairs which they place on his shoulders and can pass on with the greatest alacrity to their private business. The Fascist Government tends to give to Italy, and to the Italians scattered throughout two worlds, this keen consciousness of being Italians, controlled, but also supported, by a strong government.

"One can understand," says Mussolini, "how thousands upon thousands of Italians, especially those from the south, who in the past twenty years have wandered all over the world, know from bitter experience

what it means to belong to a nation which is weak in the military sense and without prestige."

The action taken over Corfu, which has been judged from various standpoints and criticized abroad, was nothing but the logical sequence of this principle, the principle of respect for the dignity of Italy. It was not decided upon lightly. One of our generals together with our diplomatic mission were massacred and betrayed; unarmed they were ambushed in the woods of Janina. Orders were sent at once, threatening immediate retribution, and in that night of September, 1923, forty ships, seven thousand armed men, with munitions and baggage, concentrated before Corfu, the outpost of that chief provoker of war, Greece.

"I give you seventy hours to occupy the island."

"It is not possible."

"It must be."

Mussolini did not sleep that night, nor any other night in that month of September. . . . He gave back her dignity to Italy; and Italians throughout the world, from the pampas of the Argentine to the oases of Africa, from the Atlantic to the Pacific, felt themselves for the first time guarded, defended, by the strong and willing arm of a father.

He replied to the remonstrances of the Swiss Government that he could not admit that a nation which had not fought for seven centuries could judge a nation which in four years had lost 600,000 dead.

And to the other Powers, who vaguely hinted at a blockade: "Exports in excess of imports would delight me."

He was content to win, not to "shatter." This in itself was a victory over his own nature, with its bent toward "shattering." His wisdom acted as a curb on the impetuosity of his instincts.

"Let us hope this severe lesson will cure Italians from the malady of conventional phrases," was the conclusion drawn in Parliament and drawn from the

hostility aroused against us on the part of nations which in the conventional phrase had been "traditionally friendly."

. . . . . .

In June, 1922, Mussolini had written in *Gerarchia*: "Is Fascism a movement to restore the authority of the State, or one to subvert that authority? Is it order or disorder? How can we reconcile its reiterated proclamation that it wishes to restore the authority of the State with its action in flouting the representatives of that authority? . . . Can one be conservative and subversive at the same time?

"In the programme of Fascism, the State is defined as 'the judicial incarnation of the nation.' The formula is vague. The State . . . is this, but it is more than this. The State is, in origin, a hierarchical system. The day when a man, from a group of other men, first assumed command because he was the strongest, the cleverest, the wisest, or the most intelligent, and the others from love or fear obeyed him, that day the State was born and a system of ranks created, simple and rudimentary as the life of man then was. The head has to create a hierarchy to make war, to give justice, to administer the goods of the community, to obtain payment of tribute. It does not matter how the State originates. . . . In every instance the State builds up for itself a hierarchical system, which to-day has become infinitely complex, in accordance with life which to-day is more complex both in intensity and in extent. Decadence of the hierarchy means decadence of the State. When the military hierarchy loses its virtue, defeats follow. When the hierarchy of the exchequer becomes rapacious and devours the wealth of the country without scruple, the State totters. When the political hierarchy lives for the moment and no longer has the moral strength to take long views, nor to win over the masses to support those views, the State finds itself faced with the alter-

natives, either to go down before the onslaught of another State, or to undergo a revolution, or to infuse fresh blood into the decadent or weak hierarchy. . . . Fascism is not the negation of the State . . . but it reserves full liberty to attack that particular form of State which is represented by Italy to-day. This is its object. This is its right. We must examine the relations existing between the State in being—the State of to-day—and the potential State—that which is to come—which is Fascism.

"To-morrow the Congress of Rome . . . will determine the position of Fascism as opposed to the Italian State. We shall be, so that proclamation will say, with the State and for the State whenever it shows itself the jealous guardian and defender of the national tradition, the national sentiment, the national will, capable of imposing on all parties its authority. . . . We shall oppose the State whenever it shows itself incapable of standing out against . . . all those disintegrating elements which threaten national solidarity. We shall work against the State whenever it falls into the hands of those who threaten and endanger the future of our country.

"To refresh, or change, or weed out the hierarchy . . . that is the task of the Fascist revolution, which can be effected by the alternative methods of a slow legal saturation or armed insurrection with which Fascism has wisely been provided, preparing for either eventuality.

"In the moral order, the distance between the present Italian State and Fascism is very great. Fascism cannot accept the conception of a State which morally would be superior to all contests. How can the potential Fascist State espouse whole-heartedly the cause of the existing liberal State, if this State forces the Fascists on to the side of the Subversive Anti-State; although when those who really are anti-State revolutionaries begin to attack, Fascism rallies to the support of the existing State? . . . Is it not clear that those tactics are suicidal

when a State, instead of utilizing a force which upholds the State, treats it as if it were in the same camp with the forces which deny the State? . . .

"I do not doubt that Fascism and the State . . . are bound to become 'one entity.' In what way? In a legal manner perhaps. Fascism may open the door with the key of legality, but it may also be obliged to break down the door with the sword of insurrection. If one could put forward the proposition that in course of time the State would be identified with three forms of demagogy, plutocratic, popular, Socialist . . . then Fascism would logically become the national anti-State . . . you would have the Socialist State on the one hand, the Fascist Anti-State on the other. The issue would not be doubtful."

Compare these warlike words, this well-thought-out revolutionary programme, with the words of this same Chief two years later, after fifteen months of revolutionary experiments in government, January 1st, 1924.

"I tell you that I am pessimistic by nature and not easily given to optimism. We have not completed our task. It will take a good while to do that, but we have prepared the ground thoroughly so that our task may be completed.

"First it was necessary to rehabilitate the idea of the State. . . . We have made the Government a living, palpitating thing, working in the bosom of the national order, no longer the feeble sleepy Government which allowed itself to be insulted in a kind of absurd duel in which it allowed the Opposition to be considered sacred and inviolable while the Government served only as a useful and complacent butt. I hold that to be an absolutely suicidal theory, and if that is the doctrine of Liberalism I declare myself Anti-Liberal. We have given discipline to the Italians. It is not perfect, I myself am the first to admit that; but in order to have an idea of the progress made it is necessary to look at the different stages, to see what kind of thing Italy was in

'19 and in '20, what she was in '21 and '22, what she has been in '23."

Both the one and the other are the words of the same man.

After the promise, the beginning of fulfilment : the goal is the same.

CHAPTER XXXVII

OMENS AND WARNINGS

Milan—Angora and Rome—Unity threatened and Revolution necessary — The Strike — Agrarian Slavery — D'Annunzio — Jaurès and the Horse of Attila.

"THERE are now two States within the State, two Governments, two leaders. I am the Mustapha Khemal of a Milanese Angora, swift, irregular and victorious, in opposition to a Roman Constantinople, feeble and paralysed, the eternal Byzantium."

The opposition to the Chief was inspired by the events of the summer of 1922. Nitti had been succeeded by Giolitti. The threatening of revolution was not understood by those with whom lay responsibility. The signs so clearly written escaped the eyes and were not given credence. Events were sliding down an inclined plane, and it was not possible to arrest them. On the night that the railway strike broke out over the whole of Italy, the Minister of the Interior, Bonomi, was at the theatre. Eleonora Duse had had the doors barred at the very beginning of the performance, and from nine o'clock till midnight, deputies and officials in vain tried to get into communication with the head of the Government. In August another general strike was declared. Fascism sprang upon it and crushed it. Engineers, professors, deputies, hurled themselves eagerly against the quarrelsome Trade Unions. At the furnaces, the machines, the railways, the trams, the national life refused to stand still in obedience to an arbitrary decision. "To fold one's arms" was no longer the remedy for all ills. Youths and students gladly did their eight, ten,

twelve hours of manual labour, or went on the tramways through the most disturbed districts, giving out tickets and taking fares with the utmost calm.

In Milan, where the Socialists dominated the municipal council, they began the struggle. The water supply was partially cut off, the public services collapsed. What bitter complaints broke out over the snow which lay blocking the streets while the scavengers demanded enormous wages !

Even more significant events occurred in Bolzano and the Upper Adige. The inhabitants, accustomed to the centralized authoritative government of Austria-Hungary, jeered at the relaxation of the Italian regime, pointing to the paralysis and discontent it produced, and proceeded to outbursts of disorder and revolt.

After three years, the Italy of Vittorio Veneto was a timid interloper in her own house. In answer to the energetic remonstrances of the Fascists, the Governor of the province indeed allowed himself to speak of it as " the house of other people," at which the new Finance Minister and some of the new deputies shut the door in his face, declaring him turned out of office as unworthy to hold it. They took the government into their own hands. The populace itself upheld them.

The Congress of Rome in 1920 had declared that Fascism would substitute itself for the State, whenever the State should show itself incapable of suppressing elements of disorder and disintegration.

Hence came the logical conclusion : " The situation is paradoxical ; it cannot continue. For the country's sake it is necessary to subdue this State within the State, to subdue the revolutionary force by the conservative force. There cannot be two or three States within the State."

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Udine, on the 22nd September, 1922, saw the great work begin at its Castello. Mussolini that morning

entered the city and in the Castello addressed the people who had flocked from all parts of the Veneto.

What heights were reached from this moment onward by the fanatical devotion to Mussolini, no one who has not seen can believe. Enemies and opponents tried in vain to injure him by calumny. He was too detached from material matters and totally impervious to the lure of wealth. In answer to a friend who told him of some journalistic slander, he said : " I cannot run behind all the mad dogs which go about barking in every province : oh, yes, everyone knows all about the eight millions I took from Giolitti, the five from Genoa, and three from Elba, and that I do not know where to put all my millions ! "

The same people, in order to try and hinder the astounding success of Fascism in the country districts, labelled it as " agrarian slavery " and asserted that if not the Chief actually, still the whole movement " had sold itself to the combinations of great industrialists."

It was necessary to have followed the Chief in his progresses through the countryside to realize how exactly opposed to these statements was the truth. Crowds flocked to hear him. I have witnessed strange signs of devotion and of gratitude in strange circumstances, which showed clearly how many people carried the image of him in their hearts and had always before their eyes.

" Fascism," said its founder, " in many regions is the sign awaited for centuries. Its historic merit is that it has succeeded in incorporating vast masses of rural elements into the living body of our history. During the Risorgimento, these were either lacking, or were hostile. The war recruited them by thousands, but only as passive elements. Fascism has turned this passivity into active support of the reality and sanctity of the nation. The tricolour, ignored for nearly a century, waves to-day over the most obscure villages. Not all that blossoms to-day in this springtime of the race will survive. I know that, but I also know that such a

spiritual awakening will leave profound traces behind it."

. . . . . .

Mussolini's eloquence, closely adhering to realities, was simple and direct, He neither used much gesture, nor rounded his periods, two curious characteristics in a Latin country.

His speeches were apparently prosaic pronouncements, concise almost to brusqueness. But by flashes and bursts he rose from the recital of bare facts to the heights of thought and imagination. He who has experience knows the difficulty of fulfilling the precept of Montesquieu : the art of good writing lies in doing away with intermediate ideas. Mussolini did away with them, in hundreds of unpremeditated outpourings, delivered fresh and unprepared in numbers of halls and squares, over a period of years in every corner of Italy.

" I confine myself to the giving out of ideas," he said when his career was beginning in 1909. " . . . I try to substitute ideas for phrases. The old rhetorical form of oratory has become out of date. To-day we need conciseness and exactness."

But while avoiding rhetoric, he did not despise an occasional vivid figure of speech, especially when he spoke of Italy and Rome.

I recall one instance, when he told the Fascist companies who had come to take the oath of loyalty before the Palazzo Chigi : " You must love your country with unquenchable love."

His eloquence, resembling the bulletins of Napoleon, is not that of a man of letters, accustomed to seek at his writing-table the nuances of expression. He is a true man of action, living through in his own experience the experiences of history and touching the heart of a people through its imagination.

The pilot on that river called humanity knows that all goes on and nothing returns, and the river of a thousand years remains diverse and yet unchanged.

. . . . . .

"To restore the State, I have found the secret of a small forgotten word," says the President to-day. "For years the Italian State, always acquiescing, has lost credit and authority. He who wishes to govern must learn to say: No!"

Fascism aims at giving back to words their ancient virtue of absolute truth. If other merits be denied the Fascist revival, this will remain: it has restored truth to a country grown accustomed to sophistry.

Mussolini, before, during, and after the revolution, turned to the Italian people with rude honesty, as man to man, not with words of praise as to children whom it was necessary to deceive. The spiritual optimism which does not deny pessimism but accepts and overwhelms it, because evil exists only in a material sense and the unconquerable forces of good will overcome it—this courage both of mind and deed gave to the Chief his magnetic prestige.

In his speeches during September and October, 1922, he declared open warfare on the opponents of Fascism and of the nation, in words which were without any rhetoric, which were composed of hard facts: "Dante is great," he said, "because he understood that words are living things . . . the mystery of words is a mystery of life."

Mussolini as an orator produced an effect which was the exact opposite of that created by d'Annunzio. Mussolini seemed a torrent of lava, restrained and utilized by an iron will. You felt in him the constraint which he forced upon himself, and that he was, as it were, putting his ideas into the form of a soliloquy.

One who saw the notes written by Jaurès for his superb final oration at the International Socialist Congress in 1914, on the eve of the world conflict, tells me that on one folio appeared the solitary phrase, "The horse of Attila is let loose." His eloquence sprang up in a fount from this image.

I have observed the notes made by Mussolini for

some important speech; they are notes of facts, jotted down in a few syllables. Men are necessary instruments, therefore they must be won over, but he despised and avoided the plaudits of the crowd. He had need of popularity, but suffered from it, though it pleased him. He fled from applause with the haste others show in seeking it. But communion with the crowd acted as a magnetic current and did away with all dissimulation. The people understood him, were united to him by some hidden thread and were the more closely drawn to him when he least permitted them to break into facile acclamations.

Hence the seed sprang up and flourished the more because the snow had obliged it to send down strong and deep-twisted roots.

CHAPTER XXXVIII

ON THE BARRICADES

Minister without Portfolio—The Strategy of the Triple Screw—October 1922—The Moment arrives—A Rifle and a Bullet—Was there a Revolution?—A Responsible Leader—A Masterstroke—Not a Minister, a Governor.

THE men of the old régime had believed in many rumours of revolutions, which turned out only to be plots that failed.

In September and October, 1922, people did not whisper of revolution, they cried the word aloud. It became essential to appoint some Minister to counteract the movement. Mussolini was offered the post.

Not with too great haste; there was no need for that. . . . Still, he was to be a Minister! Without a portfolio, it is true, but one so young could afford to wait!

"Yes, now I am to act as the Great Umbrella at the Ministry! A Minister without a portfolio, like poor Bissolati: solidarity without autonomy, responsibility without power!" remarked the Chief caustically. "We are the new Italy: her only hope of salvation. We cannot let ourselves be wasted and used up in this way."

But he was working to gain time and mature his plans. His adversaries would not be able to parry a blow. Men more clear-seeing, more aware of the need to act quickly, would have accepted his proposals at once, proposals which were both moderate and legitimate.

"The time has gone by for that," he declared at once, on finding his proposals met by trifling concessions or evasions. And when it was decided to act on lines laid down by him, once again the most important parts of his programme were omitted and once again "the time has gone by."

Threateningly and stormily he said it, for in times of tempest delays are unpardonable. "To-day and at once," according to the motto of St. Catherine of Siena—Now is the right time.

. . . . . .

On the 24th of October, 1922, at Naples, he made an important pronouncement, speaking as a soldier commanding his troops.

"Leaders, legionaries, black shirts of Naples and all Italy!

"To-day, without striking one wounding blow, we have conquered the burning, vibrating soul of Naples, the burning soul of all the south of Italy. The demonstration is complete in itself and cannot be turned into a battle, but I tell you with all the solemnity that the moment calls for—it is a matter now perhaps of days, perhaps only of hours—either the Government must be handed over to us, or we shall seize it by marching on Rome!

"It is necessary, in order to act simultaneously, and in order that in every corner of Italy we may seize by the throat the miserable men who hold political power, that you should be ready and on the alert. I tell you solemnly and swear to you that orders, if they are necessary, will be given!"

That day, for the first time, he wore, over the black shirt of his uniform, the scarf with the colours of Rome.

The Congress broke up, in the orderly tumult of an army, with the fateful cry—"To Rome! To Rome!"

On the evening of the 27th, he was at the theatre in Milan. Half-way through one act, word was brought to him. "A telephone message. It has begun." He rose, calm and quick. "Here we are. Good-bye." He went.

At Cremona, the Black Shirts, anticipating his plans by a few hours, had seized the telephone, the telegraphs, the postal services and the public offices, with inevitable loss of life—a dozen young victims.

Towards midnight, at the *Popolo*, feverish prepara-

tions were made for the barricades. The last motors left hurriedly, bearing the last copies of the ultimatum, which had been secretly made ready for some days past and which next day were to be placarded all over Italy

" Fascists of Italy !

" The hour for a decisive battle has struck ! Four years ago, the National Army entered upon the supreme offensive which was to lead it to Victory : to-day the Army of the Black Shirts grasps that incomplete Victory and, marching with determination on Rome, leads her back to the glories of Campidoglio. To-day, Leaders and Legionaries have been mobilized. The martial law of Fascism has been put into force. Under the orders of the Chief, a secret Quadrumvirate has been formed, with a mandate to concentrate all the military, political and administrative functions of the party in their hands.

" The Army, as the supreme reserve and safeguard of the Nation, ought not to take part in the struggle. Fascism lays renewed stress on the deep admiration it feels for the Army of Vittorio Veneto. Nor does Fascism march on the agents of the public administration, but against that class of imbecile and mentally deficient politicians, who, during four long years, have not known how to give a Government to the Nation. Those classes which compose the productive bourgeoisie know that Fascism wishes only to impose discipline on the Nation and to aid all those forces which assist its economic expansion and its well-being.

" The working classes, the people of the fields and of the factories, the transport workers and the civil servants, have nothing to fear from the Fascist rule. Their just rights will be loyally observed. We shall be generous to our unarmed adversaries. We shall be pitiless towards the others.

" Fascism draws its sword to cut the numerous Gordian knots which enmesh and strangle the life of Italy. We call upon Almighty God and upon the souls

of our five hundred thousand dead to witness that only one impulse animates us, only one desire draws us together, only one passion inspires us ; to contribute to the salvation and to the greatness of our country."

"*Fascisti of all Italy!*

"As Romans, summon up your spirit and your strength. We must conquer. We shall conquer.

"*Viva Italia! Viva Fascismo!*"

The next day, the *Popolo* came out with a clear and stirring appeal :

"This is the situation : a great part of northern Italy is completely in the hands of the Fascists, Central Italy—Tuscany, Umbria, the Marches—is entirely occupied by the Black Shirts. In places where the public offices have not been taken by assault, the Fascists have occupied the railway stations and post-offices, the nerve centres of the life of the nation. . . . Victory is seen to be complete, with the practically unanimous consent of the nation. The Government must become entirely Fascist.

"Fascism will not abuse its victory, but it will not see it cut short. . . . The Fascisti have been, and are, wonderful. Their sacrifices have been great and must be crowned by complete success. . . . The men of Rome must understand that the old forms must be done away with. To-day a constitutional settlement may be arrived at, but to-morrow it will be too late. . . . A decision must be made ! Fascism desires power and will have it."

The genius of Mussolini's plans consisted in their unexpectedness; he took people by surprise, treating matters, men, and situations in a way quite different from what was expected.

While all were waiting for an attack on the capital, according to the usual tradition, he set to work on a plan adapted to Italian realism : his campaign was to work from the circumference, drawing a line through numerous points simultaneously, taking in the smaller cities. In this way individual attacks would be more easily

successful and in the widespread national movement even an occasional check would lose importance relatively: a local affair could be easily prevented from spreading and would be compensated for by successes obtained elsewhere.

Perugia, at the geographical centre of Italy, had been chosen by the military Quadrumvirate as its headquarters. The assembling of two hundred and fifty thousand Black Shirts, of whom one hundred thousand had been mobilized, was carried through with speed and decision, according to plans drawn up by the Duce himself, with infallible strategic foresight. The centre of Italy was cut across by three diagonal lines, which, while protecting important points, all converged on Rome, ready to crush her in the grip of their three claws: one line ran from Pisa to Civitavecchia, the next from Perugia to Monterotondo, and the third, possibly the most important, ran from the Paduan valley along the coast of the Adriatic, from Rimini to Ancona and Castellamare. Along each line were posted garrisons and reserve troops; each ended in a body of armed men under their leaders.

"Our destiny as a nation is riveted to Rome," said the Chief, and not without cause was the revolution expressed as "the March on Rome." But it was necessary to advance on Rome from outside, not as many expected, to take Rome in order to hold Italy; from all over Italy the advance was made on the supreme goal.

Facta was Prime Minister. He thought of offering armed resistance and issuing a decree declaring Italy in a state of siege. The King, who had experience of actual warfare, held that it would be wholly absurd to offer the ridiculous sight of a few cavalrymen posted on the banks by the Ponte Milvio at Rome.

War is always terrible and horrible; civil war is horrible and infamous; a theatrical parody of it is a thing intolerable.

The head of Italy's army refused to sign the decree;

some say, with words of bitter blame: "I know my people better than their leaders: I will not sign."

Meanwhile the old Parliamentary hands tried to save the game, offering the prominent Fascisti a share in a Ministry which should be presided over by Salandra "in order to preserve Parliamentary continuity.". . . "After all, your Mussolini has never even been an Under-Secretary!" And the good Fascisti in question, knowing the sad state of inferiority which consists in being young, timorously hung their heads.

Not so, however, their Chief. The time had come, he felt, to end the deadlock by the intervention of force.

General Fara issued the order to the legions drawn up at Santa Marinella, at Monterotondo, at Tivoli, at Orto: "At dawn on Monday, the Fascist columns will advance on Rome at all costs."

Mussolini had given the call to arms.

It was not a metaphorical call to arms. Those arms were a reality.

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Amongst Mussolini's papers was a list, written in his own handwriting, containing the names of those destined to be Ministers and Under-Secretaries. He had his Government all drawn up and ready. "I do not mean to create a Government from a faction. Not the whole of it, but only a small part, is Fascist."

One of the proposed Ministers, a good, honest Lombard, who was not a Fascist, when asked if he would accept, replied:

"I must consult my friends and my party."

"What friends? What party?" asked Mussolini. "I ask you because you are yourself, not because of your party." And he won his point.

The headquarters of the revolution were the offices of the *Popolo* at Milan, with the neighbouring Casa del Fascio, which was filled with Fascist troops. No one received any pay, each person paid his own expenses, besides a personal contribution to the levy. Factory

hands, peasants, students, clerks and shop assistants, all alike were ready to accept scanty rations in order to see the *Duce* and show him their readiness to lay down their lives, their devotion and their obedience.

Towards midday on Oct. 28th, firing was heard in the street below the windows of Mussolini's room. With a bound he seized his rifle and rushed down to the barricade : " Steady all! What is it ? What has happened ? " At that moment he ran the greatest risk of his life. One of the young men who followed behind him, seeing him mount the barricade, levelled his rifle in the direction of the enemy and fired, the bullet grazing the head of the Chief and whistling through his hair just above his ear. The rage of the rest of his followers was such that they were ready to lynch the clumsy youth, but Mussolini, smiling, consoled and defended him.

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The revolution was, as all revolutions are at the start, wise and moderate. Not a drop of blood was shed except that of its own legionaries.

Hence many doubt, and some deny, that it was a true revolution.

The sole " terrorist " measure taken at Milan was the temporary suspension of the newspaper of the extreme Reds and the censorship imposed on other journals. Only one of these, that with the largest circulation, refused to conform. On October 28th, it issued an appeal urging the army to fight in opposition to the revolution. With what sort of spirit would that army have taken action ? How was it possible to ignore the fact that the Fascists were all ex-combatants, brothers and comrades-in-arms of the army ? The head of the Quadrumvirate was the general who had held the Pasubio against the enemy, Emilio De Bono. At the head of the Legionaries marched a famous general, Fara, and the ex-generals Gandolfo, Ceccherini, Zamboni and Igliori, bravest of the brave.

The editor of that paper tried to negotiate, but

Mussolini decreed either censorship or suspension : " I am a Leader ; I am responsible for every one of my men, for every drop of blood of the least one of these soldiers who have put their trust in me. . . . A paper such as yours is widely read, one word may suffice to precipitate events. No concession, no indulgence. That is my duty."

. . . . . .

On the 28th October, Mussolini, still in Milan, had brushed aside the proposal that he should take office under Salandra. " Tell him I will not come to Rome to discuss and compromise. Unless I am given an absolute mandate to form a government—my own ministry—I will not leave Milan, save to place myself at the head of the legions."

At midday, on the next day, October 29th, General Cittadini, aide-de-camp of the King, called up Mussolini on the telephone.

A silence fell upon the room.

" Yes, certainly. I thank His Majesty. I should like to receive confirmation of the official mandate by telegram. I will then leave for Rome at once."

Half-an-hour after the yellow envelope was delivered.

" His Majesty the King begs you to come at once to Rome. He wishes to offer you the task of forming a Ministry. Signed—General Cittadini."

Notified by telegrams, telephone, messengers, the legionaries cheered and shouted, " To Rome ! to Rome ! " Throughout the city, notices were distributed with the swiftness of a sigh of relief and happiness. " God protect you ! God protect Italy ! " people shouted on seeing him descend the stairs. From the steps of the flower-decked train he spoke a few words :

" To-morrow Italy will not have a Ministry. She will have a real Government."*

That night the train carried him towards Rome in

* " *Domattina l'Italia non avrà un Ministero. Avrà un Governo.*"

MUSSOLINI AND HIS FASCIST STAFF IN 1922

MUSSOLINI IN ROME
A Fascist Salute

triumph, stopping at the stations to be surrounded by shouting crowds.

At Civita Vecchia, at Santa Marinella, the Chief addressed to the triumphant Black Shirts a few words of thanks and encouragement and admonition.

" We have won a great victory. It is our victory, we must not spoil it. Until the new Government has been formed, you will remain under arms. What we have taken we shall hold. I insist upon the strictest discipline, the most complete order and absolute sobriety.

" Italy is in our hands and we swear to lead her back into the ways of her ancient greatness.

" Within a few hours—I shall be in Rome."

CHAPTER XXXIX

MUSSOLINI IN POWER

The New Government—Forty Thousand Men Demobilized in Thirty-six Hours—"Impossible is No Word for Me!"—The Triumphal March in Rome—An Orgy of Hard Work—Mr. Washburn Child on Mussolini—Mussolini's Methods—Educational Reform—The only "Revolutionary Measure"—Labour Measures—The Question of Force.

HIGH-SOUNDING language was put in Mussolini's mouth on the occasion of his visit to King Victor. The report went that after apologizing for his appearance before the King in the black shirt of the *Fascisti*, he uttered these words: "I bring to Your Majesty the Italy of Vittorio Veneto, reconsecrated by new victories, and I am Your Majesty's faithful servant."

Theatricalities of this description would not have been at all in Mussolini's style. The reality was very different and was marked by a frankness which was free from all flattery and all the more respectful for that.

At midday, October 30, 1922, the new Prime Minister left the Quirinal and made his way through excited and enthusiastic crowds to his hotel, where for the next five hours he devoted himself to matters of urgent moment, including some of those minute details upon which great enterprises are so often wrecked.

He entrusted to a small body of very prominent "Black Shirts," the duty of acting as a Guard of Honour to His Excellency Signor Facta; he despatched others to various strategical points throughout the country, keeping an eye on all the publishing-offices of the Opposition newspapers; he issued precise instructions to officials of all ranks; finally, he constituted the Government, which by seven o'clock that evening entered upon

its duties with the sanction of the King—a "record" in the history of Italian Ministry-forming! He then summoned to his presence the head of the railway administration; it was all-important that no untoward incident should mar the course of the historic day. "I give you 24 hours as from 8 o'clock," he announced to that functionary, "in which to despatch from Rome to their respective stations the 40,000 *Squadristi* who are now being demobilized."

"But Excellency, that is impossible! That could not have been done even in war-time! We shall need at least three days."

"Twenty-four hours, I said. Impossible is no word for me. I must ask you to carry out my orders."

And with a swift change from his air of authority to one of friendliness, he added with a smile:

"Come now, *Commendatore*, it can be managed quite well. And it *must* be managed! And you will see that the Government will know how to reward good services to the State."

It is difficult to withstand an order from the Chief—to withstand one of his smiles is impossible. The *Commendatore* promised, and sixty interminable trains—over and above those engaged in the ordinary service—issued forth from Rome that very evening.

Poor "Black Shirts!" Many of them were in Rome for the first time in their lives and had been looking forward to a bit of a stay in the Eternal City. Great was their disappointment and there may well have been a little grumbling but there was no breach of discipline. The will of the Chief must be obeyed.

Perhaps the brief hour of triumph will stand out all the more gloriously in their memories.

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The first *legioni* had entered Rome at dawn that morning of October 30 by the Ponte Milvio. There was a vain effort at resistance at one spot, shots being rained down from the windows of houses in the quarter

of San Lorenzo. A few of the *Fascisti* bathed with their young blood the very threshold of Victory, but no lives were lost and very wisely there was a complete abstinence from reprisals.

When, finally, amidst outbursts of every form of jubilation, the immense stream of legionaries had wound its way into the Piazza del Popolo, only the Egyptian obelisk, older than Rome itself, stood out with its lions above the sea of men, the steps below it covered by a phalanx of bareheaded youths with their black pennants.

At three o'clock there came a fanfare of trumpets and an unfurling of banners. The Chief placed himself at the head of the forces, which proceeded to move forward in magnificent array.

The triumphal march took five hours, the route being by the Corso and past the resting-place of the " Unknown Soldier " in the Piazza Venezia, every man genuflecting before the Symbol of the great sacrifice.

The Chief then led his victorious followers up the hill of the Quirinal in front of the Palace from which the King looked down upon them. General Diaz, the Commander-in-Chief of the Army in the war, and Admiral di Revel, the Admiral-in-Chief of the navy, rode to either side of him. Mussolini had already chosen them as Ministers of War and Marine respectively and the King ratified the appointments in due course.

The great function over, Mussolini was heard to say " *E adesso, andiamo a lavorare !* "—" And now, let us go and work ! "

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The work was to prove hard and wearisome !

" We have accomplished nothing yet," Mussolini was to say after two years of arduous exertions.

" No, we have accomplished nothing new. We have been only getting things to rights. When we have cleared off the arrears, then there will be something worth looking at ! For the present I am busy preparing the way merely for the future, getting rid of all the

troublesome old unsolved problems of the past—problems which have been lying buried under mountains of words during the half-century and more of our modern Italy. A Government is in its essence a thing with continuity. Just reflect that for a very long period Italy has had no Ministry which has been able to remain in office : a six months' tenure has been about the average. How could you expect a Government to think things out seriously, to embark upon lasting enterprises to assume responsibilities for the explanation and justification of which time is essential ? A mediocre Government which remains in power would be preferable to excellent Ministries unable to do so."

That was the burden of a long article in *Gerarchia*, in which Mussolini proceeded to contrast his own methods with those of Moscow. The present Revolution he declared, was not going to destroy at one blow, " the delicate and complex machinery " of Italian State administration. It would proceed steadily and regularly in the true Roman fashion, taking for its motto : *nulla dies sine lineâ*.

This article appeared on New Year's Day, 1923—the first Fascist year.

On that same auspicious New Year's Day, while the Fascist Chief was motoring towards Rome along the ancient Appian Way in the dusk, there flashed forth suddenly in the sky an immense shooting-star—almost comet-like in its magnitude and brilliancy. It slid swiftly to the horizon and vanished.

I witnessed it myself together with other persons seated in the car.

. . . . . .

The amount of work which Mussolini had to cope with during the first few months of office was incredible, amazing. To friends who urged him to spare himself and who warned him that human powers were limited—even his—he would reply : " No matter !—it is now or never. We are surgeons at the bedside of a sick man

who is in danger of death. No matter if the surgeon is tired, the operation must be proceeded with at once, without a moment's delay. If I knew I should die to-night I could not now take a moment's rest."

The sittings of the Council of Ministers lasted for five or six hours and there were thirty-two sittings during the first two months of office. Mussolini kept his eye on the work of all his colleagues, all matters of importance even in regard to details being decided by him. His colleagues worked with similar energy ; one of them, quite a young man, dying from overstrain.

. . . . . .

It would be a better, simpler and easier state of things, if to belong to a party meant to rise to a high ideal, and if the acceptance of a watchword—even one enriched by sacrifice and consecrated with blood—always implied the possession of an individual conscience guided purely by this ideal. But as long as the world has existed the good, quiet, easy-going people have been fully occupied with the little round of their household and business affairs, and never risk themselves in a revolution. Two kinds of men make revolutions—the best and the worst. When the fire of passion and feeling blazes up and ideals and personal interests set multitudes in agitated movement the cream and the scum come bubbling up together. Men of high ideals, young, ardent, pure-souled, take action ; but with them are wild, impulsive, violent spirits, those for whom to strike a blow is an object in itself, and whatever is the cause for which they fight they are simply urged on by their own restless nature. There were both classes in the Fascist movement, but the latter were in a minority compared with the great majority whose good intentions were, if anything, exaggerated in their idealism.

But not all those who mean well possess real strength of character. Most men are fickle and changeable. The longing for power and ease, the allurements of riches and pleasure are terribly powerful agencies of

corruption. Only men of the highest type have at their command a brake power that will act effectively to stop a descent by the slippery down-grade that self-interest makes it so easy and pleasant to take. All history and tradition shows us this as the track on which nearly all revolutions have ended in destruction. Gold and blood are like to quagmires in which they disappear headlong. The evil and dishonourable acts of individuals supply weapons for those who oppose their ideals, and bloodstained acts of repression provoke a sanguinary reaction.

But the Fascist Revolution was essentially an ethical one, comparable only with the English Revolution. It was not, like the French Revolution, a rising of representatives of the new Social classes, urged on by tyranny to take possession of the Government of the Country in order to assert their rights. It was rather in the nature of an uprising of vindicators of moral values which had been trampled in the dust.

So it was in its beginnings, and so, thanks to the strength and determination of Mussolini, it was to remain.

. . . . . .

"We must arrive naked at our goal," said Mussolini, when there was some talk of conferring on him the title of *Duca di Rodi*—"Duke of Rhodes"—to commemorate the annexation of that island. And on the occasion of the marriage of the Princess Royal Yolanda, he insisted that the vacant Grand Cordon of the Annunziata, the highest honour the King could confer, should be bestowed not on himself but on the venerable President of the Senate, Signor Tittoni. "I have as yet done nothing," he said, "to deserve such an honour. Your Majesty will allow me to wait; for the present my one ambition is to work."

"A glutton for work," Mussolini has been called by Mr. Washburn Child, ex-Ambassador of the United States in Rome, and no other foreigner knows the Italian Prime Minister so well. "Do take care of

yourself," Mr. Child said once to him when he saw Mussolini looking pale and worn after long nights of work at his desk. "You have seen me slightly tired like this before," was the reply. "But you have seen also how quickly I can restore my strength. There is endless work to do. Detail!" He spread his short strong arms apart to indicate the world of detail. "Detail interferes with the wise solution of the larger problems."

"Later," continues Mr. Child, "he told me that he had learned to value a particular hour of the day more than any other; it is the hour before sleep. He told me that every day he used that hour, first to review all that he had done, and then, turning his back on yesterday, he would spend the rest of the time planning exactly what he would do to-morrow."

More than 1900 new legislative measures—more than 1900, I say!—were put in hand by the Fascist Government in less than two years. Some of them were measures of great importance. This was the task of clearing the ground, of raking away the past and making ready for the future.

There are, of course, all too many evils for which no immediate remedy can be provided, such, for instance, as the high price of living—worse, according to statistics, in other countries than in our own. But at least one may avoid the intensification of this evil through the continual issue of new paper money.

"This infernal paper-money which results in loss of credit and in want and misery!" Mussolini exclaimed once: "I would like to smash up the printing-presses which turn it out!"

Under the new Government the lira, happily, ceased its downward trend and began soon to rise a little; and at the beginning of 1924 Signor de Stefani, Minister of Finance, was able to announce officially in a speech at Milan that the year's Budget would show a surplus of more than two milliards.

Italy is working, planning, starting new industries

and increasing her trade, and thus keeping at arm's length the black scourge of unemployment. Vexatious forms of taxation, affecting personal liberty, have been to some degree diminished, and laws injuriously affecting industry have been done away with as well as laws which have had an evil influence upon thrift. The father and the husband have been given more encouragement to earn and put by money for their own family, having less to fear from the rapacity of the State; there is less temptation also to have recourse to fraud and deception.

These blessings are due to a Government strong enough when necessary to say "No."

For years and decades past—in fact ever since the Italy of to-day came into existence—there has been talk of the necessity of constituting a single supreme Magistracy in Rome in place of the three Courts of Cassation, which entangled and complicated the administration of the law; but the unification had never been achieved—the legal worlds of Turin and Naples always opposed it. It was decided on without delay and put into immediate execution by Mussolini's Government with an iron hand, simultaneously with the abolition of a number of tribunals which had little work to do in the smaller towns. Vercelli, a little town in Piedmont, which laid claim to ancient glories and privileges, protested in vain. A few weeks after its fruitless opposition, its streets were decorated and illuminated in honour of the Prime Minister, who was passing through it on one of his journeys.

And for how many decades had not there been talk of educational reform! Now, at last, that eminent philosopher, Professor Giovanni Gentile, having been made Minister of Education, there was promulgated and carried out in all its details and ramifications a scheme of reform extending from elementary schools to the universities. It turned old customs inside out, hit at vested interests, and upset the habits and militated against the inclinations and prejudices of millions of people, over and

above the hundreds and thousands of students and teachers and professors more immediately concerned; but it was in accordance with the interests of the country and it was instituted with inflexible energy.

"Of all the reforms which we have introduced," says Mussolini himself, "the Gentile law is the only one measure which has been in very truth revolutionary; it has transformed a state of affairs which had existed since 1859."

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"It isn't possible that he should go against us poor working people," remarked one Luigi Arsari, a humble innkeeper, as he gazed upon a photograph of Mussolini which he is in the habit of carrying about with him. He has been one of us himself. He has known poverty and has done manual labour. He is bound to wish us well, knowing as he does what it is to have to earn one's daily bread—and even what it is to have to go abroad to do so. I was a prisoner in Vienna," he went on, "and I was there again as a soldier with the Italian Mission after the Armistice. They laughed at us, for all we were the victors. 'What are you about, you Italians?' they said. 'You have no Government, you have no leader!' Well, we've got a Government now and a leader, too."

In point of fact, the first measures which were introduced were labour measures. Of all the European nations Italy was the only one which adhered officially and without restrictions at the Washington Convention to the proposal for an Eight-Hours' Day, now established by law.

In 1919 the Fascists' programme had been formulated as follows:

(*a*) The institution by law of the State of an eight-hours' day;
(*b*) The institution of a minimum wage;
(*c*) The ceding to representatives of labour of the right to take part in the management of industrial concerns;

(*d*) The entrusting to proletarian organizations (proved to be competent and worthy) of the management of public works and services ;
(*e*) The rapid and complete systematization of railways and all forms of transport ;
(*f*) A necessary modification of the law regarding sickness and old-age insurance, lowering the limit of age from 65 to 55.

In less than two years, these demands had been translated into action by the Fascist Government, which, having won the confidence of the people, had gone so far towards establishing general prosperity that the amount of time in the year lost in strikes was decreased to 200,000 days from the enormous figure of 7,000,000 which it had reached in the year before the march to Rome.

In regard to foreign affairs, great was the general surprise when the real nature of Mussolini's so-called " Imperialism " was discovered. Instead of being a maker of wars he was found to be a maker of treaties. The fact is that Mussolini's " Imperialism " is merely one more aspect of the simplicity of his outlook: and merely a recognition of a concrete fact. As he himself puts it:

" There will never be a period of peace until the peoples shall have abandoned themselves to a Christian dream of universal brotherhood and shall be able to extend their hands to each other across the oceans and the mountains. I, for my part, have no great faith in their ideals, but I do not rule them out because I rule out nothing: everything is possible, even the impossible and the absurd. But to-day, seeing how things are to-day, it would be a blunder , a danger, a crime, to build our house on the shifting sands of Christian Socialist-Communist Internationalism. These ideals are worthy of respect, but they are still far from realization."

Force is not everything, Mussolini admits, but it is the fundamental thing—the thing to which we must inevitably come back in the end. " Others do not always

keep this fact in mind," he says : " I do. I never rule it out from the play of possibilities. For there is no need to desire war—that atrocious business, and all who have had a hand in it know how atrocious it is, and above all there is no need to wage war; but one cannot afford to be oblivious of it. The nation which rules war out as the *ultima ratio* is lost."

CHAPTER XL

WHAT FASCISM STANDS FOR

"From a Revolutionary Movement to a Legalized Status"—The Founding of the Volunteer Militia of National Safety—The Great Duty of Obedience—"For my part I prefer 50,000 Rifles to 5,000,000 Votes!"—The Fascist Ideal: Order, Hierarchy, Discipline—The Anomaly of the Italian Constitution—Fascism and Religion—The Fascist Code—A Leader.

AS Mussolini himself is given to saying, it is no easy matter to effect a transition from a revolutionary movement to a legalized status: the problems involved have taken his thoughts continually, he declares, "while others are sleeping . . . To suppress all the squadron organizations and 'Squadrism' itself, which had brought the Fascist party into power; not to go beyond the limits of the Constitution (and I have always taken the greatest care not to touch what are the main pillars of the State) and to reduce mere demolition to the minimum, because to pull down is easy, but to build up is difficult: these are the important points we must bear in mind. . . . Without any exaggerated pride, we may well be content with what we have done and we must continue our work. We have laid the foundations. We have now to construct the building."

Thus he spoke to the Ministers and to the Chamber of Deputies on January 1st, 1924.

The *Squadrismo* of the Black Shirts had given the impulse to the creation of various other such bodies—to the Blue Shirts of the Nationalists, very elegant in their appearance; to the Red Shirts of the Republicans and Socialists, an untidy lot; and to the drab Khaki Shirts of the Liberals.

Mussolini, as soon as he assumed power, abolished

all the *Squadrismi*, merging them in the Volunteer Militia for the National Safety, instituted as the outcome of a decision taken by the Council of Ministers and formally sanctioned by the King.

This was Mussolini's biggest achievement as a statesman—it had about it that characteristic of *semplicità* of which he spoke when treating of Machiavelli.

Have you ever noticed that in England and America the hero of the detective stories, from Dupin to Sherlock Holmes, is always the representative of justice, while in France, a Latin country, from Vautrin to Arsène Lupin, the hero is the criminal? This fact is significant. To have made a popular figure of the man of order and to have won the warm sympathies of youth for the forces of the law, is an achievement of genius reminiscent of Tom Sawyer's when he contrived to make his schoolfellows regard the whitewashing the wall in play-time as a privilege to be aspired to and delighted in.

I do not contend that Mussolini has in a single second transformed the ex-*Squadristi* and the actual Militiamen into model human beings, but he has got rid of one ideal and replaced it by another. He has given a new direction to feelings and tendencies. What more was ever done by the greatest reformers of all time? What was Christianity itself but the greatest of all these transformations of accepted ideals?

Obbedire!—"To obey!"—that is the watchword, contemned and despised, which Mussolini has raised to the highest pinnacle. He has reasserted the joy, the dignity, the worth, of obeying—he has made men realize that obedience is the virtue of the soldier, the true, the brave, with discipline and responsibility for its corollaries.

"The Black Shirts," declared Mussolini in July, 1923, "represent the flower of the Party; they are the trusty, vigilant, invincible Guard of the Fascist Revolution." The new Militia into which they had been turned was not to be thought of just as an addition to

the army. The army was based upon conscription, while the Militia was based upon a free offer of service, and had clearly defined duties which the army by its very nature could not perform.

To the great organized force of 300,000 men are added 10,000 young Fascisti of from 15 to 18 in Vanguard Legions, and 100,000 small boys of from 6 and 7 and 8 to 15, children of the people, grouped together under the significant name of "Balilla," from the gallant youth so-called who in 1746 threw the stone which was the signal for the uprising against the foreign invaders. How proud they look, these little fellows, of their black shirts and of the paternal regard shown them by the *Duce!* And what a sight it is, above all at the great parade, to see the tiniest of them all, little mites of three or four, perched proudly upon great broad shoulders and borne thus as the "mascots" of the companies!

You will perhaps remember Rudyard Kipling's story, "The Army of a Dream"? It may almost be regarded as having been a prophetic picture of the state of things now existing in Italy. An armed nation—the classical democratic and anti-militarist ideal fully realized—embracing males of all ages from early childhood to full maturity. It is not without significance that among the earliest to fall in Rome in the cause of Fascism—wounded by a treacherous shot—was the Lombardian Franco Baldini, a man of about fifty, who had by his side his young son of seventeen.

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"For my part, I prefer fifty thousand rifles to five million votes"—so Mussolini may be heard to assert to-day. It is an assertion worthy of the anti-Parliamentarian who in April, 1919, declared: "I firmly believe that Parliament is the pestiferous bubo which poisons the blood of the nation!"

And in *Gerarchia*, in March, 1923, he expressed himself on the whole subject very characteristically.

Liberalism, he admitted, was a method of government well suited to the 19th century—a century dominated by two such phenomena as the growth of capitalism and the development of the sentiment of nationality.

"But in what," he proceeds "consists the Liberalism which to-day, more or less obliquely, inspires all the enemies of Fascism? Does Liberalism stand for universal suffrage and such conceptions? Does it mean keeping Parliament permanently sitting so that it may continue to present the ignoble spectacle which has evoked general disgust? Does it, in the name of 'Liberty' mean leaving to the few the liberty to destroy the liberty of others? Does it mean making way for those who declare their hostility to the State and who are working actively to destroy it? Is this Liberalism? Well, if this be Liberalism, it is a theory and a practice of surrender and ruin. Liberty is not an end, it is a means. As a means it needs to be controlled and dominated. Here we come to the question of force!

"I beg my friends the Liberals to tell me if ever in all history there was a Government which was based exclusively upon the consent of the people and which was ready to dispense altogether with the use of force. There has never been and never will be such a Government. The consent of the people is as mutable as the sands of the seashore. The consent of the people is never complete, never permanent. There never was a Government that made all the governed happy. And granted that, however far-seeing the Government may be, there must always be malcontents, how shall you prevent their feelings from growing and from becoming a danger to the State? You must have recourse to force.

"Now Fascism throws the noxious theories of so-called Liberalism upon the rubbish heap. When a group or a party is in power it is its duty to fortify and defend itself against all. The truth, manifest henceforth to all whose eyes are not blinded by dogmatism, is that men are perhaps tired of liberty. They have had an orgy of

it. Liberty to-day is no longer the chaste and severe virgin for whom fought and died the generations of the first half of the past century. For the youths of to-day, intrepid, eager, stern, who envisage the dawn of the new era, there are other words which exercise a more potent fascination and these words are : Order, Hierarchy, Discipline. . . .

" Be it known then, once and for all, that Fascism knows no idols, worships no fetishes. It has already stepped, and, if need be, will quietly turn round to step once more, over the more or less putrid body of the Goddess Liberty."

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To us—to me at all events—who have worshipped devotedly and reverently at the shrine of Liberty such strong expressions may well seem like insults to the ideal of Love arising from the confusion of Love with what is evil and degraded. Perhaps the Chief himself felt this, for, returning to the subject on another occasion, he made his meaning clear in these words :

" If by ' liberty ' be meant the suspending every day of the tranquil ordered rhythm of the work of the nation, if by ' liberty ' be meant the right to spit upon the symbols of Religion and of our native land and of the State, very well, I as Head of the State and Chief of the *Fascisti*, declare that this ' liberty ' shall never come into existence."

But in judging Mussolini's strong expressions, we must remember that we are dealing with a combative public man who knows the value of violent effects—and of a public man who is actor and dramatist enough to revel in them.

We must bear in mind, also, his uncompromising temperament, ready and eager always to give to his thoughts the utmost freedom of expression.

Besides, the man who is afire with a great conception is apt to be violent in his attitude towards all opposition. But for this weakness, he would not be strong. Admir-

able are the maxims which inculcate toleration. Without reciprocal toleration we could not live. But the man who is nourishing a great project with the best of his blood, the real constructor of a great idea, cannot regard without hatred those who oppose him and place obstacles in his way.

Every reform is a disturbance for the inert and has to run counter to existing interests and provoke some discontent. A stone displaced on a mountain slope may bring down an avalanche. A man who means to carry through a whole-hearted policy cannot act on other men if he is disarmed. Cæsar, after winning many battles and saving Rome, said he would be a prisoner or proscribed if he had not the Legions at his back. For Mussolini, with his determination to carry continuously into effect his great ideals, even the five million votes he obtained from the Italian people in that marvellous plebiscite of the elections of 1924 were only such a support as a turn of fortune might sweep away. Such a dubious form of security was not enough. As he himself said :

" We have still a Constitution which is like the pinafore of a little girl of twelve worn by a buxom young matron in the twenties. Italy did not yet exist, Piedmont in 1848 was a powerful little state still in embryo. The press, city life, the great industries, methods of communication, were things to come, phenomena in process of formation. Consequently the pinafore is very short and skimpy and worn and full of holes. Yet people cry out that we must not touch it! Why not ? There is no governing by means of patches! "

The latest patch was the recent decree regarding the press which evoked so much clamour.

In Italy we have no one organic law dealing with the press, and this poor " patch " displayed itself beneficially despite its shortcomings. Mussolini has entrusted to a Commission of eighteen members the task of deliberating on the reforms that may be advisable in

the Constitution. But he insists that everything of this kind is only a means to the end and he insists that what Italy needs most is "a generation of expert workers." His eyes sparkle when he discourses upon this topic :

"Twenty thousand leaders, twenty thousand *condottieri !*—teachers, engineers, bankers, captains of industry and five thousand officers ; three thousand magistrates ; ten thousand functionaries : all men of the first order, thoroughly equipped experts, men who have taken science into their very tissues. That is what Italy needs. That is what I must get ready for her. From forty to fifty thousand men, functioning with the regularity of clockwork."

And he insists on each individual in the organized nation—and above all each "leader"—realizing his own responsibility. Even the subordinate "leader" must regard his work as a "vocation."

"Every great calling," he declares, "is a priesthood which stamps with its character all a man's acts, even the least of them. Jealous of his honour, prodigal of his life—that is the true officer ; high-minded, serious, almost ascetic—that is the magistrate ; smart, fierce, but justice itself—that is the police official. I am talking of the fifty thousand experts whose task it would be to act as guides to the whole nation. The people are sick and tired of politicians. What we have to bring into existence is a great aristocracy of experts. I have made a beginning. I have distributed the State officials and employés into thirteen grades comprising a little less than half a million Italians—as it were in pyramid fashion. In the higher grade there is to be only one man : the head of the judicial magistracy." . . .

The recognition of hierarchies as the basis and origin of the State is embodied by Mussolini in his treatise, "*State, Anti-State and Fascism.*"

Every form of sacrifice and privation experienced in the pursuit of a great aim is regarded by this aristocratic

son of the people as a high privilege, almost as a sacerdotal honour. For the common people the commodities of life—enough money, enough bread, enough—but not too much—of wine ; all that is necessary for their happiness and welfare. But for the thinker, the man of science, the poet, he preaches the doctrine of endurance and the rule of calmly-accepted self-denial.

Hence, also, and not as the result merely of opportunist calculation, the spiritual revival brought about by Fascism. Religion is viewed by Mussolini as an important political and social fact, but in his own heart also he is religious and the name of God is frequently, and never idly, on his lips.

His attitude was made clear in an official communication recently in which he dealt with the subject of Freemasonry. He wrote :

" Fascists regard themselves as Crusaders, whose ideal is summed up in two conceptions : God and their native land ; and they are called upon by a mystical duty to sacrifice themselves to the national cause. The religion of the people, that weighty and ancient force which has upheld it in times of submission and of suffering, which has shaped that moral and civil spirituality, that individual loftiness of mind, which constitutes its greatness, is recognized by Fascism. Fascism, therefore, refuses to associate itself with any kind of warfare against mystical ideas which the people have inherited from their forebears."

Fascism, in itself, indeed, in Mussolini's own words, " before being a party is a religion," and the oath by which the Militia devotes itself " to the service of God and the Country " is impregnated with aristocratic and soldierly mysticism. To find similar expressions of fervent religious feeling we must go back to the days of Mazzini and to the formula with which men entered into the association of his " Giovane Italia " : " In the name of God and of Italy, in the name of all those who shall fall in battle for the greatness of the country,

I swear to consecrate myself exclusively and unceasingly to the welfare of Italy!"

And the Fascist Code thus defines the aims in view:

"The military uniform of the Militia is the symbol that gives to the country a new masculine vigour and that lays down the foundations of a powerful hierarchy to which the Party will be able eventually to confide the destinies of the nation.

"The Fascist Militia will serve in a pure spirit derived from a deep mysticism, based upon an invincible faith, dominated by an inflexible will, scorning all opportunism, and all caution as signs of cowardice, resolved to encounter any sacrifice for their faith, conscious of the weight of a solemn mission to save the Great Mother of all, to come to her support and to purify her.

"*The Fascist soldier knows only his duty. His sole right is to do his duty and to find in it his only joy.*

"Officers and soldiers alike must obey with humility and command with vigour. Obedience, in this Volunteer Militia, must be blind, absolute and full of respect towards the highest grade of the hierarchy, towards the Supreme Chief and towards the Executive Committee of the Party.

"The Fascist soldier has a moral law entirely to himself. The common moral law, associated with the family, with political affairs and with social relations, primitive as it is, is of no value to the Fascist soldier. Honour is his law as it was for the Knights of old: a law which aspires to the highest grade of perfection without ever attaining to it, a law full of vigour, stern, absolutely just, even when it is opposed to the formal written law, which is always inferior to the moral law of the Fascist soldier."

I shall give now a fragment of a dialogue between the Fascist Chief and some Black Shirts, in the presence of a crowd assembled on a certain occasion in Milan on the subject of Rome—it is typical of many such occasions.

" The revolution," said Mussolini, " has been made with sticks. What have you in your hands now, all you to whom I speak ? " (The *Fascisti* shout out " Rifles ! " and lift up their rifles and brandish them in the air.)

" I want to have a talk with you and I am sure your replies will be clear and bold. My questions and your answers will be heard not only by yourselves but by all Italians and by all mankind, because to-day, after a lapse of centuries, Italy once again is giving a lead to the course of the civilized world " (Applause).

" Black Shirts, I ask you : If the sacrifices of to-morrow should prove heavier than those of yesterday, will you sustain them ? " (Vociferous shouts of assent.)

" If, to-morrow, I asked from you what may be called the sublime proof of discipline, would you give me this proof ? " (Enthusiastic Fascist shouts of " *Sì ! Sì !*— Yes ! Yes ! ")

" If to-morrow I gave you the watchword, the watchword of the great days, of the days which should decide the destiny of the peoples, would you stand by me ? " (Outburst of enthusiastic cries : " Yes, we swear it ! ")

" If to-morrow, I were to tell you that we must resume and continue the march and advance in other directions, would you come ? " (More shouts of " Yes ! Yes ! ").

" Are your hearts ready for all the ordeals which discipline may demand from you, including the humble obscure ordeals of your regular day's work ? " (*Fascisti* unanimously, " Yes ! Yes ! Yes ! ")

Fascism—I repeat—is the latest in date of those crusades that come from time to time to reinvigorate mankind with a martial idealism that takes serious count of realities, and presents in its novel outward appearance the attraction of new methods and forms, when those that the same eternal instinct had inspired at an earlier time have become worn with long use and grown unattractive by familiarity. When the essential and

practicable objects of such a movement have been attained, it may be that, as the high-souled and disinterested pioneers disappear or fall away, it may sink into the decline of utilitarian materialism. There is the ceaseless swing of the pendulum, changing its direction, it may be almost invisibly at first, then faster and ever faster. It reminds us of the old myth of the phœnix, which as it grows old prepares its funeral pile and arises from it renewed in life and vigour.

In such times of change it is rarely that we find men with such elastic temperaments and many-sided gifts of mind as to make it possible for them to play a leading part in the movements of two successive eras, or to hold a prominent place in one such movement and themselves set in motion and guide that which follows. Such was Napoleon, the instrument of, and a leader in, a Revolution, who then became the creator of an Empire. Such too is Mussolini.

In his "War Diary" written among the Carnic Alps, at the date of May 3, 1916, we find Corporal Mussolini noting as worth remembering these words of Joseph Mazzini:

"The really important things are not fixed by diplomatic documents, even though these may forecast the course of their own era. The secret of power is in the will. . . ."

And he cites further on, from Mazzini's pamphlet of 1832 on "Some things that impede the development of Italian liberty," this passage:

"There is a lack of leaders; what we want is to have the few who can guide the many—men strong in faith and in self-sacrifice, who will temper like steel the excited feelings of the multitudes; who will have a united grasp of the end in view; who, fired by every generous impulse, will concentrate on one thing only—victory; who will take account of all the various elements of the problem, and find the words of life and guidance for all; who will look forward, not backward; who

will make themselves the comrades of the people and face all dangers with the resignation of men doomed to be the victims of one or other of them ; who will inscribe on their banners, ' Success or death,' and who will keep this promise."

The war brought to men the sense of the realities of life, and faith in the necessity of leadership. And the disorders of the after-war time persuaded them of their need of organized leadership. From the anonymous despotism of a hundred thousand nonentities, they turned with eager longing to the One who could command in earnest. As Schiller sang of another crisis—" The people rejoiced because the time of horror had passed away and a judge once more watched over the land." So Fascist Italy respected its ordered hierarchy of new leaders, because they depended upon the One Chief, whose undisputed claim to authority was imparted to all the lower grades, these deriving their right to command from him.

Men feel the need of a leader, and it is so rare a thing to find one that, when this happens, there is an almost miraculous outburst of joy in the satisfaction of their desire. So Mussolini had not to think of any magic strokes of a wizard's wand when he imposed upon his people self-sacrifice, work, hardness of life and the curb that was needed to avert anarchy.

It is only the proud recognition that a Chief has been found once more, ready to work and to direct for all, that can explain the enthusiasm he evoked at gathering after gathering, where his mere presence drew the people from all sides to greet him with frenzied acclamations. Even the men who at first came out of mere curiosity and with indifferent or even hostile feelings gradually felt themselves fired by his personal magnetic influence. I have often heard men find fault with him in his absence, but never in his presence have I heard anyone dispute his orders or even his simplest suggestions. I do not say these are always to the point, or that he is

in any way infallible. He who multiplies his tasks and his responsibilities thereby multiplies also the occasions and the probabilities of error. He has made such errors because he is a man, and errors sometimes on a grand scale because he is so great a man. But because of this also his very mistakes are not fruitless, because he learns from them. The firm self-reliance and the inherent consistency of decisions that at first sight seem hardly to be in true accord, and the courageous honesty with which he takes the consequences, even though they may be serious and unpleasant for him, create an atmosphere of confidence around him. The widespread persuasion that he must be right is an element of success.

"It's lucky we have Mussolini"—"This is what Mussolini has willed"—such expressions as these became almost proverbial in the first days of the movement. Forty millions of Italians gladly shouldered each his own burden, when they saw what a mighty load this new Atlas was bearing up. There arose in those early days a kind of fetishism, of which he was the object. It was grotesque with some, touching in the case of simple folk for whom it became almost a superstition. Thus, when Etna broke out into eruption a newspaper described, as if it were an actual fact, its lava streams checked in their advance by the fiery glance of his eyes. The story was told of a visitor to the Etruscan tombs of Orvieto hearing from the guide that their inscriptions were written in an old language that had not yet been deciphered, and replying, "Ah, that's because Mussolini has not yet been here. When he comes we shall see what he will find out."

The women of the Abruzzi, and especially the widows and mothers of those who had fallen in the war, strove to touch his hand as they would crowd to touch a shrine or a relic. Some would hold up a fatherless child before him, others a war medal. There was not one of them who did not show with her sorrow the pride of sacrifice.

The mayor of a little Sicilian village stopped the Chief's motor-car, and said to him, "I have nothing to ask of you, but this only. Perhaps you will never again pass over this ground of ours. Dismount that you may touch it with your feet!" Another of these village mayors came to him wearing his scarf of office over the Sunday coat of a small farmer, and said gravely to him: "At dawn this morning my two brothers, who were killed in the war, appeared to me in a dream, and said to me, 'Go to meet the Chief, kneel to him, and tell him that we, the silent dead, bless him and thank him for having saved Italy for which we died.'" Then with uncovered head he knelt upon the road.

This state of mind is fertile in legend, but it can also work wonders. On the other hand, there is always the danger that such hero-worship may collapse under the weight of exaggerated expectations of the impossible. All the same, there is some measure of a man's real greatness in this personal magnetism, these myths which grow up around him, this devotion which he inspires.

Yet, though he has passed through the greatest crisis of his career with a sudden rise to fame, there has as suddenly been let loose against him and against Fascism a storm which is still far from being calmed. Action which does not generate reaction is an impossibility. With a party of energetic young men, some of them inclined to violence, the more that is accomplished the more likely is friction to arise, and it is impossible that mistakes will not be made. Even though they are kept in hand by a severe discipline, it is inevitable that there will be at times excesses, all the more when they have to meet the provocations of those Italians who banked on the ruin of Italy, who lost and who do not want to pay.

A crisis was inevitable—not so the way in which the crisis actually developed. That was especially cruel and lamentable because it implicated persons in delicate positions, and standing far too near the Chief himself.

He has suffered thereby to an extent one can hardly describe. But when was it ever in the power of man to choose the form in which inevitable evil is to fall upon him?

Some weaker part of the superstructure may break under the shock of the Matteotti crisis, but it will leave unbroken a solid mass of humanity, strong in its greatness, standing clear of fogs and clouds, and—above all—united with that one man who, though he may err and is not omnipotent, has in himself the power and the courage to make history that will become a legend.

CHAPTER XLI

MUSSOLINI THE MAN

A Newspaper Discussion of His Character—His Own Comment—The Journalist in Him—His Portraits and His Smile—"The Blacksmith's Frowning Son."

WITH all the contradictions in him and all the complexity, all the apparent but not real inconsistencies, what are we to make of Mussolini?

Some time towards the end of 1924, the Fascist daily paper of a great Italian city set on foot a discussion among its readers regarding Mussolini's character. Mussolini put a stop to it. "Be so good as to send for the editor," he telegraphed to the Prefect of the district, "and request him to close the discussion with the following remark: *Poichè l'onorevole* Mussolini dichiara di non sapere esattamente ciò che egli è, assai difficilmente lo possono sapere gli altri.*"—As he did not know exactly what he was himself, it would be very difficult for others to know. The newspaper in question was, he commanded, to publish this *autodefinizione*, as he called it, and to bring the correspondence to an end. It might be resumed, perhaps, fifty years later!

An error in psychology, perhaps, for we are apt not to understand our own dispositions so well as others do, but it makes an interesting document!

The journalist in Mussolini comes out in most of his public utterances.

Answering a body of great manufacturers, who were endeavouring to muzzle a well-known Labour spokesman and agitator, he called on them to desist and not to injure

* "The honourable," used as a prefix to the names of members of the Italian Parliament.

the man's prospects. "In the Mussolini of 1914, he urged, "could you have foreseen the Mussolini of to-day?"

Even now, when he is Prime Minister, as he confessed once to a gathering of his newspaper colleagues, Mussolini has not ceased to be a journalist. He takes a supply of scribbling paper with him even to Cabinet Councils, and often, when he may seem to be engaged upon ministerial memoranda, he is really composing "little articles" for the Press. Even in his official communications we shall often find the true journalist's touch. "We are surrounded," he declares in one such document, "by pedagogues and wiseacres, every one of them preoccupied with some logical dilemma." And it is the leader-writer of the *Popolo d'Italia* whom we recognize in the phrase in which the Italian Premier sums up the League of Nations as "*un couvent de laïques, fantasques, impuissants et, par cela même, dangereux.*"

Statesman and journalist, his are the methods, frank, sensible, brusque, which have rid us of the diplomacy of the old order. He says out boldly and clearly what others would whisper in circumlocution. His words reach their goal unmodified and unimpeded. And concerning things as to which he might be misinterpreted, he holds his tongue.

"It is journalism that has formed my mind," he himself has declared; "it was journalism that enabled me to get to know the human material of which politics are made. Before receiving in the Hall of Victory at the Palazzo Chigi those Commissions which bombard me daily with their memorials . . many thousands of Italians of all professions and of all ages had made their way into my little editorial den. . . . It was as though all Italy had been unrolled before my gaze. It was journalism, moreover, that gave me a certain capacity for hard work. The function of governing is not a transcendental thing, as some people seem to imagine—it is just a matter

of working hard. It means remaining at your desk from ten in the morning until midnight."

Speaking once to a number of journalists, Mussolini said: "You know I respect journalism and I have given proof of this. All I ask is that journalism shall take into account certain inevitable historic necessities. I want the press to co-operate with the nation. And with all my friendly and brotherly feeling for you, there is also a feeling of real respect, because I do not know but that some of you may carry the marshal's baton, I will not say in your knapsack, but in your editorial portfolios."

. . . . . .

Impulsive and meditative, a realist and an idealist, perfervid and yet wise, a romantic in his aspirations but a classic in his handling of practical affairs, Mussolini has a groundwork of consistency in him underlying all these seeming incompatibilities. This, above all, may be confidently said of him—he is a man of courage. He loves danger. The very idea of cowardice revolts him.

His physical courage has found amusing illustration of late in his treatment of the lioness which was presented to him some time ago and with which he is often to be seen playing in the Zoological Garden. "*Italia, Italia, bella!*" he calls out to it in tones of tender affection, and the splendid young animal comes bounding up to him. That was all very well when it was only a small cub, kept in the house, in a little room close to his study. But now it is big and it is caged with four other young lions which, as the keeper says, "do not know His Excellency," and frolicking with it is a dangerous pastime. The keeper, for his part, thinking of his own responsibilities, would gladly see it ended!

This also may be added. He is a man of energy and a true Italian.

"A man like yourselves," Mussolini described himself in an address to a body of miners, "with just

A MORNING RIDE

MUSSOLINI AND HIS FAVOURITE YOUNG LIONESS

your own qualities and your own defects—with all that constitutes the essential elements of that peculiar type of humanity which makes the Italian."

An Italian, then, *par excellence*, and a young Italian. "Why do I go about on horseback?" he exclaimed once in the Senate, in reply to some carping allusion to this habit of his. "Why, because I am young! Youth, however, is a malady of which one becomes cured a little every day."

This characteristic outburst occurred in the course of one of his great speeches. He had been discoursing gravely and emphatically to his distinguished audience, which comprised many of the most famous men in Italy, but at this point he had broken out into a vehement improvisation. Youth with Mussolini is something more than a matter of mere chronology, it is a synonym for life and energy and power.

His youthfulness is, indeed, the thing about him that most impresses strangers who meet him in private for the first time. "He is not a bit like what he seems in his portraits," you will hear them declare. "He looks so young!" And, on public occasions, when he smiles the effect is astonishing. "Why, he is all amiability!" those who have known him only from his photograph exclaim. This is not the morose, brutal-looking Mussolini that they had imagined. A countrywoman from the Abruzzi, who had forced her way through the crowd and come close up to him, exclaimed out loud with naïve audacity: "But why do the pictures always give you such an ugly scowl?" "The blacksmith's frowning son" an American once called him.

The essential truth, indeed, may be found in that legendary frowning, scowling Mussolini. He knows men and he knows how undesirable and how dangerous it is to be at too close quarters with them. "A group of four" is his ideal. With more than that you begin to have a mob. He has no liking for a "refectory," he will complain when he has to sit down at table with

too large a company. When on occasion we of the *Popolo d'Italia* indulged in some festive celebrations, he did not drink convivially like the others. He emptied his glass at a gulp, standing alone.

An unconvivial, unsociable individualist by nature, Mussolini cultivates this inborn aloofness as a weapon of defence; this explains the frown. We have here a co-operation of instinct and policy. A man's attitude is a confession, sometimes, of the aspect which he would fain present to others.

No one finds him haughty or repellent, but no one can boast of being on terms of intimacy with him. I have seen him kiss on both cheeks a number of men well on in years upon whom he was conferring the order of the Star of Labour—an order which he himself instituted. He kissed the first of them on both cheeks formally in correct "protocol" fashion, but when it came to the others, the kisses that were exchanged became quite hearty. The old men might have found in him a long-lost brother! I have, indeed, often seen him embracing other men and I have seen him kissing the hand of a lady or fondling a child in the affectionate way that seems so natural in this land of lavish caresses; but I have never seen anyone presume to buttonhole him or to place a hand upon his shoulder. Were anyone to do so, I sometimes wonder what kind of cataclysm would come about! Even those who are entitled to address him by his Christian name—his brother, for instance, and the comrades of his boyhood —do so with a certain involuntary hesitation and in accents of respect, almost of reverence.

He knows well the meaning and worth of that word comrade—*camerata*. The word "friend" is another matter. He calls no one friend. "If the Eternal Father were to say to me: 'I am your friend,' I would put up my fists to Him," he is capable of declaring in angry mood. And when some case of perfidy or treachery has come before him he will exclaim: "If my own father

were to come back to the world I would not place my trust in him."

"No intimate friendship, a minimum of personal feelings"—that ideal of Buddhist and Christian monasteries, of Port Royal and of all religious ascetics, might almost be taken as Mussolini's rule of life. Apart from the cause to which he has devoted himself and from the ideas which he incarnates, he holds aloof from the world. The "*curriculum vitæ*" of those who surround him does not interest him.

Nothing mean or petty can take root in him. And as he does not go through life haggling about things but pays the full price, he secures the big things, the important things, which are essential to his ambition—"ambition, that last infirmity of noble minds." He himself laughs at this infirmity in his own case.

"If all shall have gone well," he said to me once with a smile of irony on his lips, "I shall perhaps thirty years hence be accorded a bust which will serve as a rendezvous for nursery-maids and their young men in some public garden. 'Behind the Mussolini bust at eight,' perhaps some young lovers will whisper! A fine satisfaction that will be!"

He was silent for a time.

"After all, Signora," he continued, "what have I achieved? I am a bit of a journalist, and for the time being a Minister, like so many others. I must get this people into some kind of order. Then I shall have fulfilled my task. I shall feel then that I am *someone*."

Another silence. Then he went on:

"And yet—and yet! Yes, I am obsessed by this wild desire—it consumes my whole being. I want to make a mark on my era with my will, like a lion with its claw! A mark like this!"

And, as with a claw, he scratched the covering of a chair-back from end to end!

CHAPTER XLII

A CURTSY

To His Excellency, Signor Benito Mussolini, President of the Council and Chief of the Fascists, from the writer of this book, taking farewell of him and of her readers.

THE story of your life, *Signor Presidente*, ought really to have been written by yourself. You had some thought of writing it—you went so far even as to devise for it the admirable title *Dalla Strada al Potere*,* but it remains one of your numerous potential works!

Downright and vigorous, well stocked with facts and rich in general ideas—how dissimilar it would have been to this book of mine! Mine is essentially a woman's book. It is taken up largely with details which you, perhaps, will dismiss as "gossip." But, for my part, I have read too much of history to disdain gossip. It is only through visualizing the protagonists that we come to understand the nature of great events. The story of Rome lives in the recorded actions and thoughts, loves and quarrels, of individuals. How much less we know of some of the greatest figures in history than we do of the kings of France who still walk and talk for us in the pages of Froissart and Saint-Simon!

From my post of vantage, bordering the turmoil, in a comparatively quiet backwater, I have noted something of the memorable occurrences of our time. The scene, *Signor Presidente*, is dominated by your figure. The

* "From the Street to Power."

MUSSOLINI GREETING KING GEORGE V, IN ROME, IN MARCH 1925

landscape is lit up by the steadily rising sun of your aims and hopes—by your love for Italy and by your unswerving resolution to bring her to the attainment of her Destiny.

So may it be!

FINIS

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